

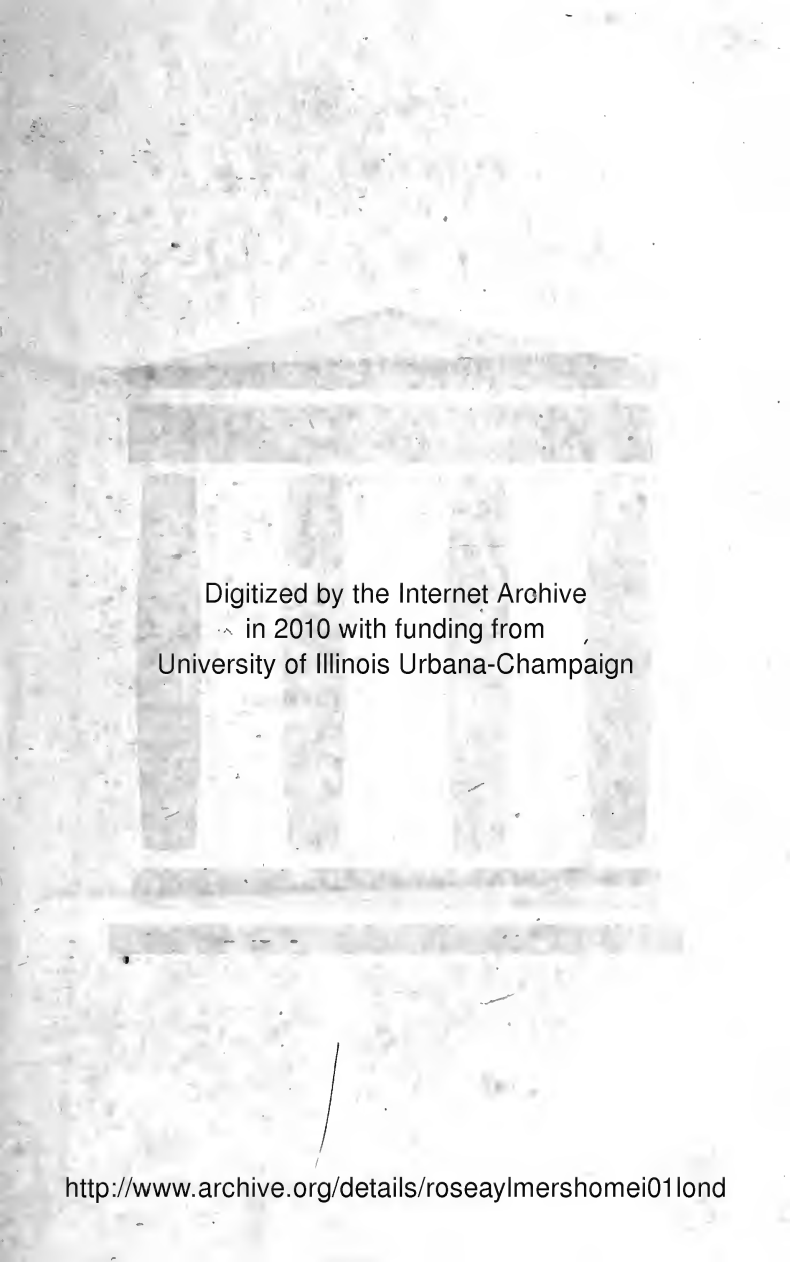


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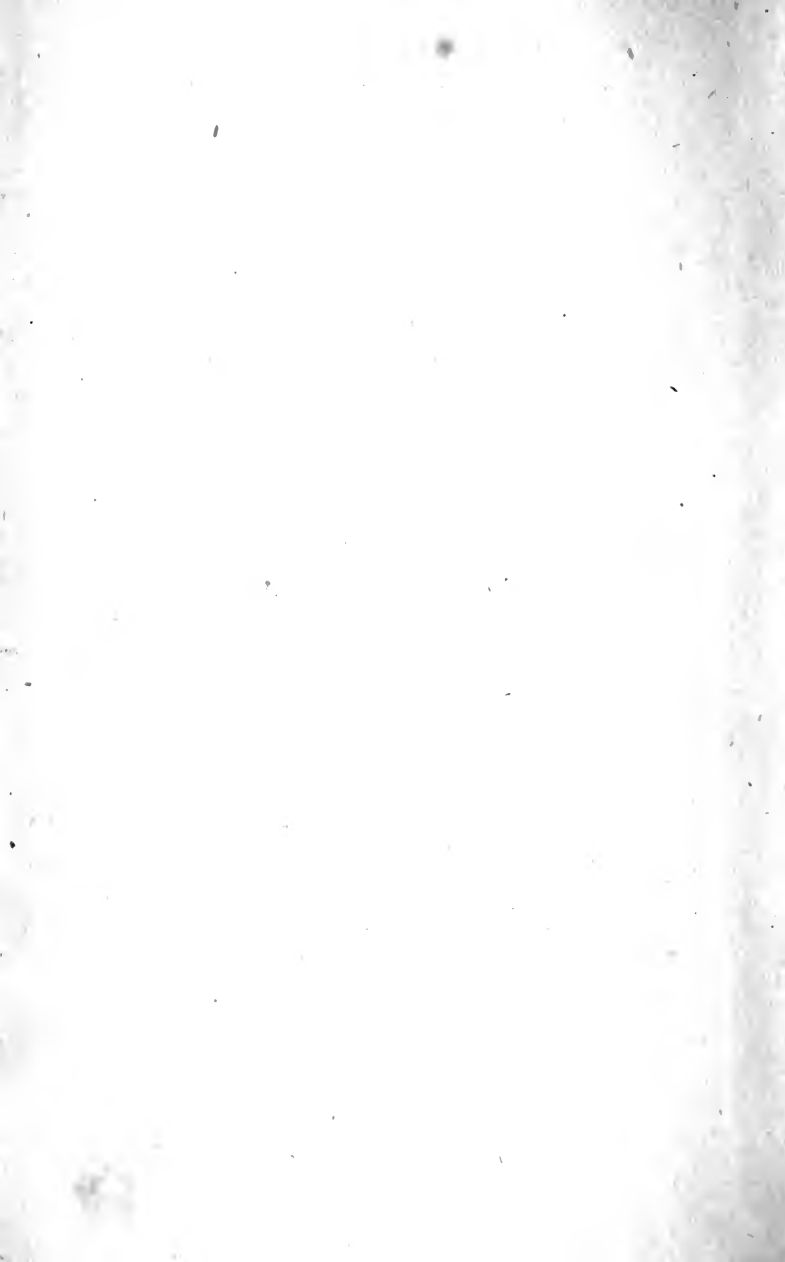
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ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

VOL. I.



ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

“Die Franzöſen haſſen eine Tragödie ohne Liebe ; wir jetzigen Deutschen eine Liebe ohne Tragödie.”—JEAN PAUL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MADAME EUCRINAZ AND ROSE PEER INTO THE FUTURE	1
II. BROAD'S COTTAGE	17
III. THE FIRST VACATION	29
IV. THE SECRETS OF THE MINE	54
V. THE FIRST RUMBLINGS OF THE THUNDER	83
VI. SUNSHINE AND SHADE	100
VII. THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION	122
VIII. THE DAILY ROUND	137
IX. A MIDSUMMER NIGHT IN LONDON	155
X. A MIDSUMMER NIGHT ON THE MOORS	173
XI. TREASURE HIDDEN IN THE DEPTHS	196
XII. SOWING TO THE WIND	216
XIII. A FATHER'S COUNSEL	232

generally 25 pages mostly = 3v.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. THE COLONEL DECLINES "CARPETUS"	245
XV. SHOOTER'S SUNDAY.	257
XVI. THE TWELFTH OF AUGUST	273
XVII. THE MINER LAYS THE TRAIN	291
XVIII. THE ALARM IS GIVEN	308

CHAPTER I.

MADAME EUCRINAZ AND ROSE PEER INTO THE FUTURE.

Our pathway leads but to a precipice,
And all must follow, fearful as it is !
From the first step 'tis known ; but—No delay !
On—'tis decreed. We tremble and obey,
A thousand ills beset us as we go.

ROGERS.

A CAB stood at the garden-gate of a fashionable London school, as a young man of light figure and easy manner was ushered into the presence of the mistress of the establishment. A smile relaxed her usually compressed lips, and her whole bearing assumed its frankest expression, as she advanced to meet him.

“You are punctual, Mr. Aylmer,” she said; “a rare virtue in the present day. I wish your sister would take pattern of you!”

“I hold punctuality to be a sacred duty, Madame,” replied Herbert Aylmer; “a duty absolutely enjoined by the golden rule; be assured I shall use my influence with Rose to press its necessity upon her.”

As he spoke his countenance beamed with high purpose, and his smile was full of sweetness; he was as wholly unaware as Madame Eucrinaz, that, in his daily practice, punctuality was rather the exception than the rule, and was only acted out when, as in the present instance, no temptation whatever occurred to its infringement.

“I hope you have been satisfied with my sister’s conduct and progress of late?” he asked, with a truly paternal air.

“With her conduct, no ; with her progress, yes,” replied the *gouvernante*. “Look you,” she continued, knitting her brows, and fixing her dark eyes as if she would penetrate the inmost depths of her subject, “I do love the little Rose dearly, and value some of her qualities much. She is brilliant, affectionate, true-hearted ; but she wants stability, she is lured aside by the pleasure of the moment, and the reason is that she is wanting in faith.”

As Madame Eucrinaz spoke, young Aylmer’s eyes had darted quick glances upon everything in the room, and every article was photographed in his mind ; his were remarkable eyes, blue and transparent, full of a womanly tenderness, but glancing hither and thither restlessly, darting a piercing look into every subject, and guaging its depths with marvellous rapidity. As Madame Eucrinaz paused,

his glance rested on her for a moment, and he replied in musical accents—

“Ah! yes, there you have it! Dear Rose’s heart is unrenewed, and how can she parry the assaults of the Evil One without the shield of faith?”

“Pardon me, sir,” replied Madame; “I do not speak of decided religious faith, but of the faith natural in many characters.”

Here a deprecating motion of Herbert’s long thin hands interrupted her; but she only knitted her black brows more closely, and fixed a more concentrated attention upon him, which had the effect of making him more and more restless, so that not only his eyes wandered rapidly from object to object, but his fingers interlaced and re-interlaced each other, and, if you had watched his boots, you might have seen that his very toes were in motion.

“I speak,” continued the lady, “of the faith natural in some characters. I watch my pupils closely, I give them my commands—some obey them blindly—that is not Rose—some obey when they know and trust their ruler—that is not Rose, again—she only obeys on her own conviction—in fact, she obeys her own reason, and has faith in no other. Do you comprehend me, sir?”

“Perfectly, Madame; but I feel sure that it is true conversion that Rose wants, and that alone.”

“I differ from you. Converted or unconverted, her faith will be weak—it will be the feeble point in her character. But for *gifts*—ah! the little Rose has talent! How she speaks French and German!—how she brings out the tones of the piano!—how she dances!”

“A dangerous gift that, Madame. I would

that in one so frail of purpose as Rose it had not been cultivated."

Again the dark brows lowered over the darker eyes, and the close scrutiny recommenced, which threatened to induce an attack of St. Vitus's dance in Herbert Aylmer's susceptible nerves.

"My penetration is greatly at fault," she exclaimed, "if you do not dance admirably yourself!"

Herbert smiled in accepting the compliment to his grace.

"Yes, I *can* dance, and should have greatly enjoyed it, had I not early seen its danger to others—it is no longer dangerous to myself. I have taken my stand for ever, and the frivolous allurements of the world have no charm for me."

He might have continued his confidence, the subject seemed so congenial to him; but

at this moment Rose entered the room, and dancing round him gleefully, finally threw herself into his arms, exclaiming,

“Herbert, you beauty! you get handsomer every six months. It is too bad you should be going away so soon after I come home—I should have liked to keep you to make love to!”

“Are you going out into the world?” asked Madame Eucrinaz.

“I am going to college, Madame. I should have gone two years ago, but for family reasons, the most imperative of which was my father’s protracted suffering in the eyes. I staid as a lay curate, visited the sick, trained the choir, and read the lessons for him. I have continued my studies at the same time, and as my father took a first-class in his day, I could not have had a better tutor. College work will now be mere child’s play!”

“It is rare to find musical talent in a man united with the deep intellectual power necessary to master classical and mathematical difficulties,” said Madame.

“Yes!” exclaimed Rose; “but you have no idea how clever Herbert is, Madame. He is awfully learned in the deep books he reads with papa, and could pass an examination for holy orders already, papa says; and besides that, he plays the piano, and organ, and flute, and paints such beautiful pictures!—and he is good, too,” added the girl in a graver tone; “if you had had him for a pupil, he would not have given you a quarter the trouble I have done! Dear Herbert!” she exclaimed, her eyes full of affectionate admiration, “you will teach me to be good at last, won’t you?”

“If you will learn humbly and earnestly,” he said, stroking her cheek. “But now we

must say good-bye to Madame Eucrinaz, or we shall miss the train."

Rose threw her arms round her governess.

"Good-bye, Madame ; I am not glad to leave you, only you know I can't help being glad to go home, and be done with lessons. I have been very rebellious and troublesome to you, and now I wish I had been good—please forgive me, for I truly love you ; and please let me come to see you sometimes?"

Rose spoke rapidly, and as rapidly rushed to the cab, and Herbert followed her, having pressed Madame Eucrinaz's hand, and thanked her for all the care she had taken of his sister. As the cab drove off, Madame still gazed from the window, her brows contracted, her lips compressed.

"My experience is wasted," she soliloquised at length, "if that young man pass through college unscathed. Better that he should not.

Better that a speedy fall should strike a first blow at his self-confidence. He goes forth to meet Goliath clad in unproved armour, despising the familiar sling and stone ! Rose, with her warm affection, too truthful to make an insincere profession, is nearer heaven than you, young man, with all your gifts and graces."

The soliloquy might have lasted long, but for the arrival of the music-master, and Madame bustled away to attend to her many responsibilities.

Meantime the travellers exchanged the cab for a railway carriage, and were borne away westwards as fast as an express train could carry them. There were few stoppages, and when they did alight from the train it was at the town of Trowbury, in Wiltshire, where a bay pony and well-used phaeton were awaiting them.

Herbert took the reins from the servant's hand, and would have driven rapidly through the town, but for Rose's entreaty.

“Do stop at the grocer's, darling Herbert ! I have saved some of my week's money, and I want to get a little tea for Betty Galloway, and a trifle for my old pet Mercy Broad.”

“Get the tea, by all means, my love,” rejoined her brother, as he drew the reins ; “but don't buy any sweets or ribbons for Mercy. She is a promising girl, but I sadly fear her pretty face will make her vain. Buy her a new prayer-book or hymn-book at the Christian Knowledge Repository.”

Rose made a wry face, darted into the grocer's and bought her tea ; but instead of proceeding to the book-shop, she plunged into a draper's, and reappeared in a few minutes with a small parcel.

Herbert drove on rapidly, and in silence. When they were free from the town, he put his arm round Rose, and said gently—

“My little disobedient sister has bought finery after all.”

Rose opened her parcel, rapidly displaying a length of blue ribbon. She playfully removed her brother's hat, twined the ribbon among the silky locks of his fair hair, and, clapping her hands joyously, exclaimed—

“Well, Herbert, I never saw anything so becoming! You are handsome and refined as a man, but you would make a lovely woman; and the blue ribbon heightens the beauty of your complexion, while it matches your eyes. It is well that I am your sister, for I should otherwise be certain to fall in love with you; and you could never take up with a madcap like me. You must take Mercy's portrait with this ribbon in her hair, and you can call

her Jael, or Jephthah's daughter, or the Virgin Mary."

Herbert smiled benevolently. His sister's merry flattery had removed all objections to the ribbon ; and when she entreated permission to alight at Betty's cottage, he at once yielded to her wish.

In leaving the cottage she met the girl in question, who had seemed a child a year ago, but had suddenly shot up into a slender and lovely woman. In the extremity of her pleasure in the beautiful, Rose bent from the carriage, and threw her arms round Mercy's neck, imprinting a kiss on her glowing cheek. Surprise and emotion painted the village beauty with two-fold loveliness ; her soft, grey eyes beamed dove-like tenderness, and the rosy lips quivered too much to be able to reply.

Herbert admired her as much at this

minute as his sister Rose did, but he checked all expression of feeling, only saying, "God bless you, Mercy," as he drove on.

Rose had quite forgotten to give the ribbon ; but calling to her as the pony trotted forward, she tossed the parcel playfully to her, crying—

"A Christmas-box that I have brought you, Mercy."

On the slope of the Down, but nearer the valley than the summit, the village church and Rectory nestled among a grove of fir and elm trees. The Rectory was a long, low house, covered with thatch, China roses, and jasmine climbing to the eaves. There was a sloping lawn in front, and beautiful shrubs in tasteful groups, and one gay flower-bed near the drawing-room window for Mrs. Aylmer's amusement, who was entirely confined to the sofa, and had been for several years.

Mr. Aylmer met his son and daughter at the garden-gate. His appearance assured you at once that he was a scion of a gentle if not a noble house ; and he never needed the prestige of " my brother the baronet," to secure for him his rightful place in society. He was poor, as many younger sons are, especially where the head of the house is not rich ; but he only regretted his want of means, because it curtailed the advantages he could give his children.

Isabel was the next to appear. In her calm expression and staid manner you saw more of the typical child of the Rectory than in her brother or sister, but you had need to judge thus, for you might live years with her without hearing aught of her character or aspirations from herself. She was essentially practical and earnest, and, if she spoke, it was to direct or to sympathise, not to draw upon

herself the attention for which she had no desire.

A happier family party seldom drew round a Christmas hearth than that which was assembled in Upper Chalkley Rectory that 24th of December. Rose was certainly the gayest member, and so she prattled on, "Well may I be the merriest, for I have come back to my home for ever! Poor Herbert must not be sad, for though he is soon going away, it will only be to return laden with honours, and to make our Christmas gathering more gladsome next year than ever." And Rose's eyes sparkled in viewing the gay picture her imagination had drawn, and she felt more certain of her insight into the future than did Madame Eucrinaz.

CHAPTER II.

BROAD'S COTTAGE.

It chanced upon the merry merry Christmas eve,
 I went sighing past the church across the moorland
 dreary;
 "Oh never sin, and want, and woe, this earth will leave,
 And the bells but mock the wailing round, they ring so
 cheery.
 How long, O Lord, how long before Thou come again,
 Still in cellar, and in garret, and on the moorland dreary,
 The orphans moan, and widows weep, and poor men toil in
 vain,
 And earth is sick with hope deferred, though Christmas
 bells be cheery."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

It was the 24th of December, and active preparations were being made in the village of Upper Chalkley for the celebration of Christ-

mas Eve. Bright fires burned at the Hall and at the Rectory, but in the low thatched house, high up upon the down, where Broad and his family lived, it was but a feeble glow that proceeded from the grate, and the one cake in course of baking ran a great risk of being spoiled by the insufficient heat of the oven.

Very near to the fire sat a short, square-built man, heavy-featured, and with lowering brows; he was reading a chartist newspaper, and a large-limbed son was similarly employed, while a younger boy, whose bodily and mental capacity would have made him a treasure in a rising colony, was exhausting his ingenuity in tormenting a half-starved bird. The cottage was the perfection of discomfort; the window, though stuffed with rags where the glass was wanting, ill sufficed to keep out the blast sweeping mercilessly across

the Downs ; the door hung so loose on its hinges that it gave free access to the elements, and the only corner out of the draught both of door and window was taken up by a huge boiler, very useful, doubtless, on a washing day, or when Farmer Hamlyn bestowed a gift of waste potatoes on the pig, but very much in the way on all other occasions. Martha Broad, the mother of the family, looked, and was, to all intents and purposes, a drudge. Her soiled and scanty garments, her unkempt locks, and the hopeless expression in her dull face, were all in unison ; and as she deluged with water the uneven brick floor of the chilly house, she seemed to feel labour and discomfort as her native elements.

Suddenly the latch was lifted, Broad pocketed his newspaper, the young man thrust his pamphlet under the big Bible, the

lad turned a tin mug over the wretched bird, and Martha leaned upon her mop. A young woman entered, neat, and well dressed, carrying a basket in her hand; but as the eye passed from the neatly clad though stunted figure to the face, it turned away disappointed, for the small grey eyes looked past you the thick lips wore an unmistakably sulky expression, and the whole aspect of the large heavy face was forbidding in the extreme.

“Oh! it's thee, Mahla, is it?” grumbled Broad. “Thee's maybe come to keep Kissa-mus Eve with us—us shall have a rare feast, lass!”

“Missis sends you a bit o' beef for dinner to-morrow,” replied the girl, whose godfathers and godmothers had named her Mahala, and whose blood relations mercilessly docked her name of a syllable; and as she spoke she took

a goodly piece of beef from her basket.

Broad's countenance relaxed, the brothers uttered an exclamation of joy, and Martha drew near to feast her eyes on the dainty morsel.

"Us'll have a feast for once," she said.

"It's middling beef," rejoined Mahala, grudgingly, "for sixpence a pound. We give tenpence for our own beef; but the master agreed with the butcher for five stone o' meat at sixpence, for poor folks—this isn't one o' the nicest pieces neither."

Broad struck his hand on the table, and the dark cloud contracted his brow again.

"Just like the beggarly gentry!" he exclaimed; "a curse on their proud charity; they do feed we for the sake of doing good works, and keeping their own account straight with heaven, not that they have any pity on we! Who knows but that the beast did die

o' fever, and the meat be poisoned ! Take it back to t' Rector, lass, and tell he, us have no need o' his offal."

"Be quiet, Sam, will 'ee !" cried Martha, in a shrill tone ; "hold your peace, man. Us have sore need o' a bellyfull once in the year ; don't turn good food, and well-intentioned, from the door. Mahala, thee should know better than to put such thoughts in thy father's head. Surely that's a new gown thee's got on, my maid ?"

"Yes, it's a cast one o' Miss Isabel's ; but I don't like it. I shall sell it to Polly Cruse, and get myself a shawl. Or maybe missis will give me a charity tippet, like the Sunday scholars."

"What like's a charity tippit ?" asked Broad ; and Martha gave her daughter a warning look, lest she should again irritate her father.

“Ah! you’ll see Mercy’s soon enough,” replied Mahala. “Her’s to have the biggest, ’cause her’s t’ oldest scholar. They are made o’ t’ list off t’ charity petticoats, such as mother has for garters.”

“And do missis expect that my bonny Mercy is to wear such rubbish as that! I’ll break it all in bits first!”

“And why hadn’t Mercy ought to wear such like?” asked Mahala, spitefully. “You did think any rag good enough for I, when I was Mercy’s age, and you did hold missis up in making me go about in a bonnet without ribbing on it, to keep my pride down; but Mercy’s made o’ different flesh and blood, ’cause she’s got blue eyes and red cheeks!”

Scarcely had she finished these words, when the person in question bounded into the house, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling with animation. She wore an old green dress, and

a black beaver bonnet, quite guiltless of any remnant of nap, and, lastly, a grey tippet, that looked like squirrel fur at a short distance, but, on nearer inspection, proved to be formed of tiers of grey flannel, laid over one another like a coachman's cape. Mercy was the head taller than her sister, and as pretty as Mahala was plain. Her sparkling eyes and winsome smile shed sunshine around her, and were not the less admired by her father and brothers because they expressed cheerfulness and docility rather than strength.

“Oh! mother,” she exclaimed, dancing, and clapping her hands, “I’m so happy! Miss Rose has come home, and she’s beautifuller than ever, and I met her in the lane, and her did kiss I, and Mr. Herbert did look smiling on I, and did say, ‘God bless you, Mercy;’ and Miss Rose did give I the grandest ribbing that you did ever see, for a Kissamus

box like. But that's not all, mother, just feel how warm my new tippit is—you shall wear it sometimes, mother ; you hadn't ought to be cold when I be warm—and, and, oh ! mother, missis do say she'll let me try to be her housemaid—only to think, to wait on master and missis and Miss Isabel, and dear Miss Rose and Mr. Herbert.”

The mother drew a long breath and grasped the girl's hand for support.

“God be thanked!” she ejaculated; “thee'll never want good food, my maiden. Missis be a real good mistrees ; her's allays behaved handsome to Mahla, and her'll be the same to thee.”

“Missis have gived I what I earned,” said Mahala sulkily; “if you do call that handsome, mother. I've been with her ten years, and had hard to work ; I was a deal younger than Mercy when I went to be nurse to Miss

Rose, and her was the aggravatingest child that ever broke her clothes. If I crossed her will she'd call me a pig, or a dog, and say I was as ugly as sin—I'm sure no dog ever was so insulted !”

“ If I hear of any one speaking so to Mercy, it shall be the last word as their evil tongues shall say,” growled Broad.

“ Oh ! of course they'll mind their manners with Mercy,” hissed the elder sister ; “ Miss Rose 'll be a-kissing of her, and perhaps Mr. Herbert too !”

Mercy's eyes flashed indignation.

“ Hold yer tongue, Mahla, and don't speak that way o' Mr. Herbert,” she said ; “ him's as quiet and godly as the rector, and you're only going on to set father's temper up !”

“ Ha' done, both o' ye, my maids,” pleaded the mother ; “ it's a fine opening for Mercy ; and thank the Lord for remembering we in

our time o' trouble. See what a small spice loaf us have got, and it's all the cheer us are like to have this Kissamus, except for the fine beef that the Rector has sent. Let us be peaceable and thankful for once in our lives."

"Thankful!" ejaculated Broad, scornfully; "when the malice of the churchwarden has thrown I and my lads out of work, and us have a bit o' bread with a pen'orth o' spice and a pound or two o' coarse beef, while other men bring good wages home and make big fires for Kissamus eve; us could eat all that's in the house to-night, only if us did us must starve to-morrow. When Farmer Hamlyn's ricks are blazing, him'll know him's been a fool!"

Martha and Mercy trembled at the threatening words and manner of the speaker, and even Mahala's dusky cheek flushed at the anger her insinuations had evoked, and she

hastened to empty her basket that she might return home.

“There’s a bit o’ tea for you, mother, and some plums and sugar and suet for a pudding for the childer, and Mr. Herbert’s sent father some baccy.”

Broad looked somewhat ashamed, and relieved his conscience by a reproof to his daughter.

“Look thee, Mahla, keep a civil tongue in thee head when thee arm does carry thee master’s favours. Whether I have need to be thankful or not is no matter to thou, but thee had ought to be respectful to they who have fed and clothed thee these ten year.”

Mahala walked out of the house in high dudgeon.

“It’s always so,” she soliloquised ; “everybody goes against me, but I’ll let them know who ought to be minded one day.”

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST VACATION.

And bland in words was wily Ludovick,
Much did he promise, nought did he fulfil ;
The Trickster Fortune loves the hands that trick,
And smiled approving on her conjuror's skill.

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

THE blooms on the Lent lilies had all faded away, and Pasque flowers and marigolds were mingled in the wreaths that Isabel and Rose were weaving for the decoration of the church on Easter day. From time immemorial the church had been adorned at this season, but the introduction of flowers among the ever-greens was an infringement made by Rose,

whose taste had been charmed by their effect in the London church she had attended. Mr. Aylmer was never wont to attach importance to mere external trifles, and Isabel was of his mind ; but Mrs. Aylmer had at first opposed the encroachment, feeling sure that it would vex Herbert. He, however, expressed more than neutrality on his return from Oxford ; he asserted an actual preference for the flowers ; so the wreathing went on with spirit.

“Dear Herbert,” said Rose, as her nimble fingers entwined leaves and flowers, “I hope you mean to be in an extra good humour on Monday. You and I are going alone to a croquet party at Oak Park, for Isabel has to help papa with the school prizes. It is very jolly there, if only nobody gets sticky.”

“If by getting ‘sticky’ you mean to express a fear that I shall attempt to dictate to Sir Henry Maitland what guests he is to

entertain, or what amusements he is to entertain them with, you may set your fears at rest. I have learnt to mind my own business at Oxford, if I have learnt nothing else ; and the light of reason is alone enough to teach a man of family to let others' business alone."

Isabel fixed a searching glance on her brother ; but Rose exclaimed eagerly—

" If you have learnt nothing else ! Why, you dear, clever thing, didn't you get an exhibition first go off, and have you not been working yourself quite to a skeleton ever since ! Everybody knows you are to have a first-class and a fellowship, and to be a bishop some day "

Herbert laughed a low, musical laugh, and slightly shrugged his shoulders, then glanced searchingly at his two sisters, and turned away impatiently after his scrutiny of Isabel.

The Monday to which Rose looked forward with so much pleasure dawned brightly ; and the fête arranged at Oak Park was a perfect success. The croquet players quickly arranged themselves in two parties, and Rose felt a little disappointed that Herbert was not on her side. A Miss Vavasour was there—a fast girl, who had had the advantage of lessons in slang from her brother at Oxford, and with this girl Herbert made a close alliance. She was greatly older than her brother, but dressed in the most juvenile style.

It was the crisis of the game. The balls belonging to Rose, Herbert, and Miss Vavasour, were within one stroke of the winning point, and it was Herbert's turn.

“ Hit your little sister hard ! ” exclaimed the lady in question, “ and drive her into the middle of next week ; then rush to my assistance, and send me to take vengeance on Mr.

Maitland ! Do this, and I am your devoted slave for ever !”

Herbert gave her a look of melting tenderness, placed his hand on his heart, and was lifting his mallet for the blow, when Rose interrupted him, saying gently—

“Yours is not a very sure stroke, Herbert, and my ball is some distance from yours, you may fail in hitting it ; so you had better pursue your own game, for I have no intention of croqueting either you or Miss Vavasour. I want to be a rover, and help Charlie.”

“Oh ! greens !” exclaimed Miss Vavasour. “I suppose ‘Charlie’ is sweet upon you, and you want the game for his side ! ‘Dear Herbert’ will play as his leader dictates. So save your advice for Je-hosh-a-phat !”

Rose coloured deeply. She was pained at the coarse allusion to her childish friendship for Charlie Maitland ; her whole womanhood

recoiled from the style of address, and she glanced at Herbert, expecting that his fastidious taste would be even more wounded than her own; but she intercepted an expressive look which he was telegraphing to Miss Vavasour, the freedom of which astonished and pained her more than all the giddy words of the stranger.

Down came the mallet; the ball sped truly, and hit Rose's so hard that both rolled together for some distance.

"Kill her now!" cried Miss Vavasour, with exaggerated excitement. "Don't let her live to help Charlie! All my hope is in you, 'Dear Herbert!' Squash the foe, beat him to a jelly, and conquer for your leader's sake!"

Again the free telegraphic look, and Rose's ball was driven against the winning-post.

"There," said Herbert, in a low tone, "I

can't but regret that you are incapable of helping Charlie."

Charlie had joined the trio.

"Never mind, Rose," he said cheerily. "It will be my turn next, and I may be able to avenge your wrongs both on Miss Vavasour and Herbert. You have one more hit, sir ; strike, and don't waste time."

Herbert struck his ball again, and though it sped in the direction of Miss Vavasour's, it did not hit it, and the lady uttered a cry of despair, and broke out into loud lamentations. But she cut these short as Charlie promptly raised his mallet for the next blow.

"Missed !" she cried, as he struck, and the start made the stroke swerve, so that the ball did not go near Miss Vavasour's.

In all haste she played again, struck Charlie's ball away to an immense distance, then flew to where some lagging members of

the antagonistic party were lingering, and sent them to places from whence they could never hope to reach the winning-post, and finally, by a long stroke, she came within a few inches of it herself. The other members of the party were also near the goal, but none were yet close to it, nor did their next strokes bring them there, so the game looked much the same when Herbert's next turn came to play.

"Now touch me and kill me," gasped Miss Vavasour. "Death from you will be sweet, as I could not bear to die by another hand!"

Again the telegraphic look, and Herbert struck her ball against the stick, as he had struck Rose's. A few more strokes, and his party won the game.

After the croquet came a champagne luncheon, and the laughter then became louder,

and the mirth less carefully guarded. A dance was proposed, and Rose glanced timidly at her brother, fearing opposition from him ; but she was surprised to hear him second the proposal, and ask Miss Vavasour's hand for the first polka. Rose was very happy. Charlie Maitland had played on her side, and now he was her partner in the dance ; it was a little tiresome that he was always wanting to take her hand ; it would seem so foolish to any chance passer-by—but could that be Herbert walking under the trees in the lime avenue with Miss Vavasour, and—yes, surely, his arm was round her waist !

Rose asked Charlie to take her back to his mother, and she left the ball-room no more till Herbert came to tell her all the guests were leaving, and he must take her home.

Mahala wore her sulkiest expression as she opened the door to their summons at 3 o'clock

in the morning, but Herbert smoothed her down by pleasant words.

“It’s a great treat to me, Mahala, to see an old friend’s face instead of a stranger’s when I return home at night. I hope I shall find yours here until you get a good home of your own, not that that will be long to wait.”

Mahala’s brown cheeks turned brick red, and her thick lips relaxed into a smile, but the eyes did not participate in the smile—their leaden gaze seemed fixed on the opposite wall.

On the morrow Herbert joined the breakfast party in good time, and, bending over his mother’s couch, inquired after her health with more than usual solicitude

“We were bad children last night,” he said, “and staid rather late at the park. I sadly feared we should disturb you.”

“No, you did not disturb us. Mahala is very quiet in opening the door; she is so considerate for me. I must have been awake when you came in, for I did not sleep till it had struck twelve, and Mahala says you were not at all late. I fancy your college notions about hours are stricter than ours.”

Herbert shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating air, which might be interpreted, “We are indeed strict,” or “I am glad you so far believe in us,” or, “That’s all you know about the matter.” Loving Mrs. Aylmer attached the first meaning to the sign, and stroked her son’s face, now adorned with a free growth of silky hair, and was satisfied.

Presently Rose entered, and was agreeably surprised to receive no reproof.

“Did you enjoy the croquet, love?” asked Mr. Aylmer.

“Oh, so much, papa! And the dinner

was so beautiful ; the dessert on the table from the first—all exquisitely dressed, and the ugly meats and things were handed round. And then the champagne was so good, and made us all feel in such good spirits. Herbert's eyes sparkled so afterwards, and he looked so handsome. And then the dance—oh ! it was ecstatic ! I danced nearly every time, and you can't imagine how my ankles ache this morning !”

The girl would have run on another half-hour, had not an ominous silence prevailed ; and she turned suddenly to her father, and asked—

“ Have I said anything that has vexed you, papa ?”

Mr. Aylmer hesitated.

“ You know, darling, your mother never likes you to dance ; and when we trusted you with Herbert, we fully expected that you

would attend to his wishes as to ours. I am pained that you should thus have preferred pleasure to duty."

Rose looked earnestly at her brother, expecting him to explain that she had been guiltless of opposing his desire, as he had not expressed any; but he spoke not. He looked pained and amazed, but remained silent. Rose was hurt and puzzled, and burst into tears.

All seemed uncomfortable, and the breakfast hour passed without any further attempt at conversation. When the party broke up, Herbert sauntered out into the garden, and Rose followed him thither.

"My dear Rose!" he exclaimed, "how could you be so inconsiderate as to worry our mother with exaggerated accounts of the dance last night!"

"Inconsiderate! Why, Herbert, I should

have thought it in the highest degree deceitful to have remained silent about it."

"Should you? Well, take your own course. You know our estimable mother has strong prejudices; and if you insist on running counter to them, either you will be in perpetual hot water, or they will make you into a lay nun like Isabel. But it is your affair, and not mine. I shall take good care that you have no power to expose my doings. Henceforth I shall be as careful of my every word and look in your presence as in our mother's."

"But, Herbert, it was all sure to come out sooner or later. Mahala would have told, or Sir Henry, or some one."

"Oh! there, we are on the prudential side, and have left the conscientious. Depend upon it, Mahala will not tell if we speak her fair. She has enormous vanity, and love of

approbation, and if you treat her as a very important person, and Mercy as a mere child, she would rather have her tongue cut out than tell of you. Besides, if you make good use of your eyes, you may find out a thing or two about a certain butcher, which would give you absolute power over Mahala. As for Sir Henry, or his guests, such people have always too much sympathy for strictly-kept young persons to breathe a word of their merry-makings to their parents."

"Herbert, you amaze me. I believe you are right about the people whom we visit—but Mahala, you don't mean to say that that handsome young Crompton is making love to her! Such a very plain, unattractive girl! And he is not a good young man, papa says. I really think you ought to tell papa what you have found out."

"There you go! Truly the spirit of gossip

seems to be dominant not only in woman's taste and imagination, but also in her conscience. I have not said that I *know* anything, I only hinted that *if* you watched you *might* see something, and you have jumped to a conclusion, and are ready to inform our father that Mahala is going to marry Crompton, and carry our silver tea-pot as her wedding portion. Seriously, Rose, you should keep a stronger guard over your tongue, or it will do infinite harm some day."

Rose looked perplexed and distressed.

"Well, Herbert, I would really rather never dance than have the burden of concealment; I shall do so no more."

"I fully approve your resolution, Rose. I danced last night wholly to please you—I shall be spared the trouble of doing so again. Dismiss from your mind at once the silly hints I gave about Mahala, I was merely putting a

supposititious case. Kiss me, my pretty Rose; we may be quite as loving to each other, though we do not agree in our opinion as to the best way of keeping the family peace."

He re-entered the house, and Rose wandered away along a shady path, till she came out upon the Down; there she sat thinking over all that her brother had said, and trying to get rid of an indefinite sense of pain concerning him. She tried to persuade herself that all the speciousness of his reasoning arose from a delicate fear of giving pain to any; and she so far succeeded, that when next she saw him alone, she volunteered a solemn promise to keep absolute silence on all matters in which she herself was not an actor. She yearned to be his confidante, and ventured to ask slily,

"Shall you go to see Miss Vavasour to-day!"

“Oh! dear no. I shall not care to see her till Commemoration, when she will come to Oxford; nor then, even, if accident should prevent it. She is not at all a woman to my taste.”

“I thought you were quite in love with her!”

“*In love!* Good gracious, Rose, your childlike simplicity amounts to absolute folly. Any girl who has not been brought up in a bottle would know that when a man uses that free chaffing tone, he means less than nothing.”

“Oh! Herbert, it was surely cruel to her; you must have led her to believe——”

“Not that I was in love, Rose. She knows better than that. Bless you, my dear little child, women of that sort never entertain serious intentions, except towards a good *parti*; and as I am not a bishop yet, Miss

Vavasour would never think of marrying me, though she might do a little love-making in her downright style for the fun of the thing. I should have been a thorough muff if I had not followed her lead ! But it is time for our mother to come out into the sunshine—go and get her bonnet and shawl, and I will go in for her.”

“I will tell Mahala you are ready ; but as to getting the things, I dare not think of it. Mahala would burn my boiled milk for a fortnight if I entrenched on her prerogative of waiting on mamma.”

Herbert laughed, and Rose went into the kitchen. Mahala's hands were covered with flour, but she held a letter gingerly by one corner, and was examining its address attentively ; she thrust it into her pocket as Rose entered, and looked at her more sulkily than usual as she gave Herbert's message.

“Was that a letter for the post?” she asked. “I am going down the village, and will post it for you if you like.”

“It’s a letter that came to me by this morning’s post, and is no business of nobody’s. Mercy have went down the village with a letter of missis’s a few minutes ago,” was the surly reply; and Rose began to think her tongue must be an unusually mischievous one, as all her proposals seemed so unacceptable.

When Mahala had done her devoir as waiting woman, Herbert supported his mother tenderly to an easy-chair, which he had placed for her in the sunshine, and reclining on the grass beside her, he proceeded to efface any unsatisfactory impression which the breakfast scene might have left on her mind.

“My sweet mother,” he said, “it will be better that I should not have the charge of Rose. I cannot resist the pleading look

in her dark eyes, I cannot check the happiness of that butterfly-like creature. It may be—it is weakness, but it is a weakness which it will require longer experience and maturer age to overcome.”

“My darling boy,” replied the confiding mother, “I cannot contradict your confession, or deny that there is an element of weakness in this extreme indulgence of yours, but neither can I condemn the tenderness of heart from which it takes its rise. Oh! that Rôse had, like you, come early under the power of religion; hers would be a very fine character if wholly submitted to God. But you have told me nothing of your college interests, my dear; do you find you have much influence with your fellow-gownsmen?”

Herbert coloured slightly, and said, with some hesitation:

“Some influence, mother, but not much.

I have been keenly disappointed ; at first I was able to lead young Hilary to united prayer and reading of the Scriptures, but in an evil moment he got to owe me money, and he has basely avoided me since."

"Alas! for the depravity of human nature ! It was sadly imprudent of you, my dear boy, with your small allowance, to venture to lend. Pray has he paid you back ?"

"Not in whole, mother. I have written again to demand it, and received no answer. He should have replied this morning. Poor George Hilary ! he has a frank face and open-hearted manner, but he is devoted to pleasure, and I sadly fear is going fast to the bad."

Mrs. Aylmer looked horrified.

"My dear Herbert, you have surely influence to arrest his downward progress ! Can't you persuade him to let you manage

his affairs; he might put his allowance into your hands, and let you pay yourself by instalments, as he could spare it? Surely he could be reclaimed, unless—unless he gambles?”

“Which I fear he does,” rejoined Herbert solemnly.

“Oh! my son! I entreat you to cut off all intercourse with him. If his debt is not a very large one, perhaps I could give it to you, then you must write to him and forbid him ever seeking you again. Promise me this, Herbert?”

“My own mother, I promise to break off all connection with him.”

So Mrs. Aylmer set her mind to raise fifty pounds, and wrote a touching appeal to her merchant brother for aid, and her hopeful son shrugged his shoulders slightly, as he soliloquised:

“George is more than likely to cast me off after my last letter—if he does not, it will be more than my weak tenderness can do to break with him. But he is a blackguard not to have sent the fifty pounds!”

Had Herbert been able to watch Mahala in the kitchen, a light would have shone in upon him, wonderfully clearing his friend's character.

On leaving Mrs. Aylmer, she put the kettle on the fire, then shut the kitchen door, and leaned a tray against it. When the steam issued from the kettle's spout, she held a letter over it till it was sufficiently moistened to enable her gently to raise the flap of the envelope. She then took out the note-sheet and an enclosure, and read :

“DEAR AYLMER,—I send a cheque for the fifty pounds. God save you from the humiliation and anguish the raising of this money

has cost me. My noble sister has given me all her jewels. If this were my only debt, I would solemnly swear never to touch dice again, but you know I am past hope.

“ Yours,

“ GEORGE HILARY.”

A malicious grin overspread Mahala's evil face.

“ Queer doings,” she soliloquised ; “ maybe you'll find it as well not to watch Crompton so closely, Mr. Herbert.”

Among the letters next morning was the identical one that Mahala had just read, and no one for a moment suspected that she could play any tricks with anything.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRETS OF THE MINE.

She had
Indeed locks bright enough to make me mad ;
And they were simply gordianed up and braided,
Leaving, in naked comeliness, unshaded,
Her pearl round ears, white neck, and veiled brow ;
The which were blended in, I know not how,
With such a paradise of lips and eyes,
Blush-tinted cheeks, half smiles, and faintest sighs,
That while I think thereon my spirit clings,
And plays about its fancy.

KEATS.

“ How far is it to the Smelt Mill ? ” asked an aged gentleman, as he mounted a stout pony.
“ I can hardly imagine the distance short enough for Miss Hilary to walk.”

“ Bless you, sir,” replied the old woman to whom the question was addressed, “ it is nobbut a step. Ye mun gang doon to t’beck, and up thro’ t’wood, and t’paster, and then right ower the moor; in this fine air Miss Hilary will reckon nowt on’t.”

“ Is it above two miles?”

“ Well, now, I can’t be sartin, but I think it’ll be about that. It’s a real fine morning, and t’air ’ll do ye both a heap o’ good.”

“ Come along then, Elsie, you have rambled about a little, and I shall look to you to guide me.”

The girl accepted the responsibility with cheerful readiness, and, turning from the dingy mansion, she walked with a rapid step down a grass-grown drive, until she reached a broken gate leading into a wood. She held the gate open for her father’s pony to pass, and then preceded him down a steep rocky

path to the bed of a brawling stream.

They crossed the brook, or "beck," as it was called in that northern district, she springing from stone to stone, and the pony picking out the pebbly places. The May sun flooded the little valley with his beams, and the young foliage of the birch and larch trees sent forth their spicy perfume, while wood-anemonies and forget-me-nots spangled the sward. Alice gathered some of the blossoms, placing forget-me-nots in her father's coat, and reaching a branch of cherry-blossom to put in her own hat; then she adorned the black pony with a bunch of larch tassels, and, leaning on its neck, exclaimed—

"Dear papa, is not this a charming place?—are you not glad we have left London?"

Colonel Hilary laid his hand tenderly on his daughter's shoulder, and looked earnestly in her face. Hers was a countenance to have

shed brightness and beauty in the gloomiest region, and now it was the loveliest of spring's treasures. Fair as the lilies of the field, she boasted "fine air" had painted her cheek with the fresh tint of the monthly rose, and her chiselled lips with a fuller hue. The delicately formed nose expressed great refinement, while in the still depths of her rich hazel eyes passion and self-devotion lay at anchor. Her forehead was broad and well developed, the eyebrows clearly pencilled, and the long dark lashes curling at the point, while massive coils of light nut-brown hair protruded from under her hat, and reflected the sunshine, as if every turn in the cable was tipped with gold. About the middle height, her figure was at once slender and rounded, and in her movements the suppleness of childhood blended with the self-possession of womanhood.

The father's features were cast in a sterner mould, yet even a casual observer would have seen that they were the source of the daughter's. His complexion, naturally pale, was rendered pallid by suffering and confinement. His hair was white as silver, and the contrast of his dark, flashing eyes and colourless face and hair was very striking. He was tall, and his air was at once soldierly and aristocratic. Alas ! he had one hand only at his command, the other arm lay in a sling, disabled by an unhealable wound received in the Crimea.

For awhile he regarded his daughter with sad earnestness, then replied slowly to her question.

“I am glad to be here, Elsie, but I miss our smooth lawn, and well-rolled garden, and shrubbery walks. But my regrets do not hover over my London home, but over the home of my ancestors, the noble property they

left to my keeping. Self-interest and cunning on the one side, and reckless extravagance on the other, have brought me to ruin, and left you all but portionless. The farm of Beechwood, this wood, and the few adjoining acres, are all that remains of my fine estates, except a dozen miles of bare moorland, and the mine we are going to. I have been cheated on every side, and of course these Yorkshiremen will cheat me. God knows what the end will be !”

Elsie drew nearer her father.

“Better days will come, dear papa ; our fortunes will rise again.”

She hesitated for a moment, and then added timidly—

“George’s last letter to me was couched in such softened words that I believe he will yet reform, and be a real comfort to you in your old age.”

A spasm, expressive of some keen mental or physical pain, convulsed the features of the old man. He pushed his daughter from him as he said sternly—

“No more, Alice. His is an evil nature; and I could better believe that this suffering limb would become strong and healthy again, than that my depraved son would reform. Why did you not show me that wonderful letter, if its tones were so promising?”

It was Elsie's turn to change her position; and she did so that her heightened colour might escape her father's piercing gaze. She answered softly—

“I feared you might not see its meaning with my eyes.”

“With your eyes! No, child, not at all likely. I should doubtless have discerned the cloven foot in every line. Look up, Elsie, and think of the flowers and sunshine again.

You have already suffered far too much for your brother's sake—dismiss him now from your mind.”

The girl passed her arm round the old man, and, pressing her lips on the hand that had returned to its rest on her shoulder, she whispered—

“If you could once say you forgave him, then perhaps I might forget.”

The soldier shook the bridle impatiently, and as the pony bore him up the winding path and along the breezy pasture beyond, his form was as erect, and his eye as stern, as if he were riding forth to reconnoitre an abhorred enemy.

The moor once gained, it required all Elsie's elasticity to keep up with the pony's pace. The heather stretched for miles on every side, the table-land broken by narrow valleys and their brooks, and the prevailing

brown, varied by oasis-like patches of verdure, where swampy ground encouraged the growth of reeds and mosses. As they proceeded, they lost sight of trees and dwellings ; and nothing but interminable moors met their view, with grey hills in a distance, where higher ground enabled them to look back towards Botcherdale. They traversed a longer distance than old Barbara had prepared them for ere they saw a chimney on the crown of a hill, and, rounding a brow, they came in sight of a group of grey buildings half a mile from the chimney, and quite at the hill foot, and from them straight lines seemed to diverge at different angles.

“ There is the smelting house at last ! ” exclaimed the old man. “ It is much further than we expected, and the walk will be too much for you. You had better rest on this knoll until I return.”

“ Oh ! no, dear father, please let me go on with you. It is all down-hill now, and I can rest while you inspect the works.”

She spoke rather sadly, for she was, in truth, weary ; and her father’s stern voice and look since she had broached that forbidden subject had been sadly discouraging.

He did not reply, but neither did he again propose her staying, and they proceeded together.

Down along the steep road, under crags and by heaps of rubbish, down to the beck, where the water was liquid mud, laden with the earth washed from the ore ; on to the grey stone buildings, where human beings were busily engaged, some carrying barrows of peat, some conducting waggons along the tramways, some shooting loads of wet ore into stalls prepared outside for its reception, some feeding two huge wheels with lead-stone,

which the wheels crushed and poured into a trough in the form of rough gravel. Women were there, too, and girls, and boys ; but they were all pumping, each holding what seemed to be a high pump handle ; but all, waggoners, porters, grinders, and washers, men, women, and children, all were stained the same light shade of mud colour.

The colonel looked sternly on ; all these people were in his employment, yet neither curtsey nor bow was made. The pumpers stared at him without discontinuing their work, but the men seemed free even from curiosity regarding him. A rumbling sound was heard, and from a low archway in the hill opposite a horse appeared, drawing a line of waggons, the first occupied by a boy, who was driving, and a tall, grave man, of aspect greatly superior to the others they had seen ; a dozen waggons, laden with wet ore, completed the train.

On seeing the colonel and his daughter, the tall man stepped lightly from the waggon, and springing across the stream, there dammed into a narrow space, he rapidly approached them, bowing to the colonel, and instinctively removing his cap as his eye rested on Alice.

“You are the overlooker here, I suppose?” asked the colonel.

“Yes, sir. My name is Richard Iveson. You will dismount, and see the works, I hope. We have a stable here, where your horse can be accommodated. Perhaps the lady will rest in the counting-house?”

“Perhaps she will, or perhaps she will want to see the works,” replied Colonel Hilary, with some irritation in his tone; for civil as were Iveson’s words, there was an easy tone of independence in his manner, which galled the old aristocrat.

He threw the reins to him and dismounted,

leaving him to lead the horse to the stable. A momentary quiver passed over the over-looker's lips, a momentary flash of indignation shot from his eyes, as he glanced at the old officer ; but as his gaze passed on to the light figure and fair face of Alice, its expression changed to one of tender homage, and, with a dozen long steps, he reached the stable.

Emerging from thence, he proceeded to exhibit the machinery to the owner, explaining every process to which the ore was subjected, from its being taken out of the mine, to its perfect form as pig-lead, speaking in a rich musical voice and well-chosen words. When they reached the smelting-house, the heat, the glowing furnaces, the half-dressed men, and the silver streams of ore, all seemed to partake of the terrible, and Elsie crept closer to her father. Iveson noticed her action with a quiet smile, bade the men stir

the furnaces, that she might see the glowing fuel and ore tossed about as a woman would stir a pan upon a fire, and then, fearing the heat would overpower her, he led the way to the counting-house.

“Those men seem half savages, Mr. Iveson ; do you not fear their becoming violent?” she said, when seated.

“Not in the least, I assure you. They are steady, kindly-natured men, and on their return to their homes this afternoon, you may see each taking his tea with his youngest child in his lap.”

“Their manners are rude and boorish in the extreme,” rejoined the colonel. “Not one of those men had the good breeding to salute his master, and many were lounging about in shameful idleness, and did not the least change their manner when they saw my eye upon them.”

“I see you do not yet understand the character of the Botcherdale people,” replied the overlooker, checking his rising annoyance. “They are an independent race, honest and faithful, and capable of very strong attachment, if well treated; but defiant, and even malicious, when they feel they are illused. They have a strong sense of justice, and seldom take offence without full cause; but once offended, they shut their eyes to reason.”

“I should never attempt to reason with them—they should do my bidding, or march. I will dismiss those three idle fellows smoking on the bank yonder before I leave the place.”

Iveson could no longer conceal his annoyance.

“Those are the most valuable workmen about the place,” he said. “Their time is their own; they do not work for you to receive wages by the day, but they are paid so much

a bing on the ore they bring out of the mine. The vein is very poor at present, and instead of the sixty miners which we feel belong to us, there is only work for about ten. They settle which are to work, and for how long, themselves, and do the best they can on their small earnings."

"I disapprove the system *in toto*; they shall work by day, and receive fair wages. Fifty of them had better decamp at once, and leave the ten for whom there is employment."

"My dear sir, the Botcherdale men would as soon sell themselves to a Spanish merchant as slaves, as they would work for you in the mine for daily wages. In a hard time they would go out as 'datlemen,' or day labourers in the land, or they would work as 'dead men,' when a fresh level was needed; but I assure you the payment by piece is a custom handed down to them by their forefathers.

My father, who was overlooker here before me, always said this rule among miners was productive of the best possible results."

"The results may be satisfactory for the men, sir, and are doubtless so for yourself, as there seems to be an understanding between you ; but I cannot see that it can be good for the proprietor to have sixty men to pay where ten would suffice. I don't understand your jargon of 'datlemen,' and 'dead men,' nor do I attach implicit faith to your assertion about the poverty of the mine ; but I clearly see my way to dismissing the majority of these faithful and independent fellow-citizens."

"As you please, sir," replied Iveson, with an unconcealed tone of hauteur. "As you have thrown a doubt upon my word concerning the state of the mine, I must require you to enter and examine it for yourself."

The colonel drew himself up proudly, and

regarded the overlooker with a steady gaze ; but Iveson's eye met his without flinching, and in his rugged features there was as indomitable a resolution as in those of the highborn gentleman. In height he slightly overtopped the colonel, for he measured six feet without his boots, and the colonel only reached that stature in his ; he was two inches wider across the chest, and had only numbered half his years.

But Colonel Hilary, though narrow-minded on conservative questions, and irritable from pain and sorrow, was a true-hearted man, and as he gazed on the manly form and expression of Richard Iveson, a certain sympathy for him rose in his mind, despite the independent tone which so chafed him.

"Yes, Iveson," he said, after a long pause. "You have a right to *require* me to go into the mine. My perusal of your face prompts

me to withdraw the doubt before entering, but I will go in for your satisfaction and for my own."

"Thank you, sir," replied Iveson, and hastened away to prepare a waggon. Elsie stole her arm within her father's, and looked pleadingly in his face.

"I shall dismiss forty or fifty of the men," he said, in answer to her mute petition.

"But not to-day? You will take time to think of it?"

"Oh! yes. I never said I would do it to-day. Except, indeed, those three smoking fellows."

He turned to look for the men in question, but they were no longer idling. One was rubbing the inside of a waggon with a stiff bunch of ling, the second tilted it suddenly, so as to throw forth the heap of dried mud which the scrubbing had detached, and the

third lined the cleansed waggon with bunches of tender young heather.

“The waggon is ready, sir,” said Iveson, approaching. “Jif Coates will go with us, he understands the mine better than the lad.”

The colonel and Elsie got into one waggon. It was small and deep like a long bath, and they could only just pack themselves within its space. The archway was very low, and the whole length of the level, fully two miles, averaged the same pitch, so the colonel had to recline in the waggon, lest his head should strike the roof.

As the little train proceeded along the dark aisle, Elsie could see by the rushlight, which her father carried, and by the one in the other waggon, the countenance of her father, and that of Richard Iveson. The former was stern, the latter varying strangely from grave,

almost sad earnestness to wondrous gentleness. His life had passed among stern temperaments and hard realities. Old Iveson had early lost his wife, and no mother's tenderness had shone on the childhood of Richard. The father's affection had found its chief expression in affording his son a far superior education to that he himself had enjoyed. He had boarded him with a relative in Glasgow, where he had been able to attend classes, and achieve learning according to his taste. And Richard was eager for the food thus placed within his reach, and worked indefatigably at lore, ancient and modern. So, while the oatmeal diet expanded his well-knit frame, sound learning developed his mind; and he returned to his Yorkshire home to pursue his father's mining trade, keep his accounts, and take his recreation in farming a few acres of freehold. From that time he worked without

ever looking back. At his father's death he stepped into his situation, and during the prescribed hours kept his mind close to his business ; but in the early mornings and late evenings he read law, physic, and theology, history, philosophy, and science ; the materials for such reading being supplied partly from the library of Lord Draycott, whose manorial residence was situated upon a delta of level ground at the juncture of Botcherdale and Garthdale, and partly by Scotch friends, who were ever ready to lend their treasures to the kindred spirit.

The waggons rolled on with a noise like thunder, water splashing against their wheels, and not unfrequently dropping from the low roof on the heads of the visitors, imminently endangering the life of the rushlights. Presently they reached a kind of chamber, and here Iveson informed the colonel they must leave

the waggons. He assisted the soldier courteously, and the lame arm disabling the father from such a task, he proceeded to lift Elsie lightly from the deep vehicle; then taking one rushlight, and giving the other to Jif Coates, he led the way along a passage similar to the one they had left, but in a rougher state, which terminated in a deep hole. Here there was neither silence nor darkness—ten rushlights flared from the rocky sides of the chasm, and ten mattocks plied in hacking away the stone. From the top of the opening to the deepest point in the excavation a narrow vein of silver ran, in some places an inch in breadth, and in some only about a quarter of an inch.

“There,” said Iveson, “you see the length and breadth of the vein. It is not the main vein, that we have lost years ago, but by the dip of this, and its relation to the fault. Jif

and I are both certain we are within fifty fathoms of it. If you would give me authority to set four dead men on, I would engage to find plenty of ore in three weeks."

"I don't take your meaning."

"I mean four men at dead work. We call it dead work when, in making a new level, wages go out weekly, and no lead comes in. That is the owner's responsibility. But I have no doubt of an ample supply, which would be largely remunerative to you."

"In the meanwhile it would cost me £20 or £30?"

"Inevitably."

"I will think of it; but what proof have you that the main vein is so near?"

"Strong scientific proof, sir. You see that the rocks lean at an angle of, say, twenty-five degrees; moreover, you see that they are displaced all along the valley, so that the stratum

that lies at the bottom here is near the top on the Beechwood side. Now the main vein runs with the displacement, and all the veins keep the direction of the dip ; this one that they are working diverges to the east, and cannot fail soon to join the main artery."

"You may be right, but it seems very speculative to me."

"It's as sartain as deeth," growled Jif.

"Oh ! of course you want dead work, now that work of any kind is so scarce."

"I don't want nowt," the man replied, surlily. "Me and another lad's boon to cut it all. Some o' our lads has gaed to Petterdale mines, and they write great cracks o't brass to be addled there. We'se want a spree at midsummer, and so we reckon on to tak a spell where metal's plentiful, and pay not begrudged. Jim Pedley says he could make a tidy fortin in Middleton mine if he could

get nobbut sixpence a bing, and nowt hinders our ganging there either."

"If you can better yourselves so much, I cannot sufficiently admire your disinterested devotion in staying in my mine so long," said the colonel, with bitter sarcasm.

"Oh! you can't, can't you?" exclaimed Jif, no way soothed by his tone. "Maybe you don't know what it is to have a wife and bairns, and a bit o' a homestead, and a decent field, and a cow one likes? Maybe you don't know how it hurts to leave the dwelling where yer fathers and mothers lived and died? Oh! no, ye don't ken, how suld ye. Sike grand folks as ye hasn't common fathers and mothers, or their love would ha' taen the pride out a bit. Folks as all t' world bows down to get fair to stink o' pride, it's purer coming nighhand a middin than biding by them!"

Having thus delivered himself, Jif stalked away, and the distant echoes informed the visitors of the by no means pleasing fact that he was riding the horse out of the mine. Iveson begged them to wait and he would fetch it back again ; and spreading some hay on a stone heap, he threw his coat over it, and thus left them to an unquiet repose.

On emerging from the mine, Elsie saw at a glance that her father was suffering and exhausted, and she inquired of the overlooker as to the possibility of getting wine for him.

“I keep brandy in the counting-house, in case of accidents,” he said ; “I will get him some immediately.”

The air seemed quite warm in that sheltered valley, though the wind blew keenly enough on the moors around. Iveson made a snug couch of ling, with a bank to lean against, and brought them brandy and water, oat-cake

and cheese. He was concerned for the suffering old man, and waited on him with cordial good-will. But as he fetched water from the spring, and handed the glass and the cake to Elsie, his hand trembled painfully, and the bashfulness of his address made him awkward. She exclaimed at the beauty of the violet patches of milkwort studding the bank, and the bright yellow mountain-pansies clustering beside them, to set him at ease, concluding with the regret that, "Loving flowers so much, she had no garden, nor even a wild flower about the neglected purlieus of Thorny Hall."

But it was very evident to Richard Iveson that the daughter was fully as much fatigued as the father. He dreaded the returning walk for her, and turned over in his mind how to make his pony serviceable. Alas! he had nothing but a round saddle, but he would lead the pony every step of the way. The

colonel, only now observing the pallor that had crept over his daughter's sunny face, was glad to accept his proposal, and the trio set out. Their guide introduced them to the cries of the grouse, plover, and other moor-birds, and entertained them with endless incidents of the neighbourhood ; but the contradiction between his manner and actions towards herself struck Elsie painfully. While speaking to the colonel his voice was rich and full, his language fluent and scholarly, but when he addressed her his tones were uncertain, and he stammered like a school-boy. Yet all the way he turned aside her pony from every rough stone, and never did a gay floweret bloom in the path but he gathered it for her. When he had lifted her from the pony, she looked in his face, and lo ! it was suffused with crimson, and he took leave without again meeting her eye.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST RUMBLINGS OF THE THUNDER.

Around him, still and ever, hung an air
 Born of the fields, and plough, and cart, and scythe ;
 A kind of clumsy grace, in which gay girls
 Saw but the clumsiness ; while those with light,
 Instead of glitter in their quiet eyes,
 Saw the grace too ; yea, sometimes, when he talked,
 Saw the grace only, and began, at last,
 As he sought none, to seek him in the crowd,
 (After a maiden fashion), that they might
 Hear him dress thought, not pay poor compliments.

MAC DONALD.

BUT a few days had passed since the expedition to the mine, and the question of the "dead work" was still undecided, when the colonel, becoming impatient for the arrival of

the post-bag, sallied forth to meet the tardy messenger, whose daily duty it was to bring it from the village. As Elsie saw him pass through the moss-grown court, she hastily snatched her garden-hat, and followed him, urged to do so, not only by her ordinary solicitude about him, but also by a vague presentiment of coming evil.

Together they entered the field-path, and had traversed it as far as the first stile, when the errand-boy met them, and the old man sat down on the low wall to open the bag. One or two newspapers he thrust into his pocket, then the bag seemed empty ; but no, there was one thin letter, and it was addressed to Elsie.

“Another letter from George. Open it, my child, and tell me the contents,” said the colonel, authoritatively.

Elsie burst open the envelope hastily, but

as she glanced over it, previous to reading aloud, as desired, her cheek became deathly pale, and her hand trembled violently. The old man saw this, and asked no question, but quietly took the letter from her, and read it himself.

And now his cheek blanches to a more lifeless colour than ever, and his hand trembles. Elsie throws her arms round him to keep him in his seat, and his head droops despairingly on her shoulder. The letter falls to the ground, and lies with its few blurred lines staring upward at the clear sky. "I am a wretch! I have yielded to temptation, and played desperately. I have lost, and unless I can pay five hundred pounds this day week I am a disgraced man. I ask no help—let me suffer, I richly deserve it!"

For some time father and daughter sat speechless; then Elsie ventured to lead him

home, and they retraced their steps in silence. On reaching the house she brought him sal-volatile, and persuaded him to lie down and rest. He remained quiet for a long time, and then said slowly :

“He bears my name, and that of my fathers ; he must not be outlawed, but I will never look upon his face again. Send for Iveson.”

Elsie had some difficulty in finding a messenger, for the maid she had brought from London had an uncontrollable horror of the moors; and old Barbara, who knew every path and turning, from long experience of the neighbourhood, could not walk so far as the mine. The day was by this time far advanced, and the short working hours which the scarcity of ore necessitated, were over, and just as Elsie was preparing to set forth on the mission herself, the stalwart form of Richard Iveson

was seen entering the moss-grown gateway. Elsie watched him as he advanced, his free step denoting full physical power, his form not bending in the smallest degree under the weight of a large pannier slung over his shoulders; he stopped once and again to note a sunny corner, now desolate as the rest of the pleasure-grounds of Thorny Hall, but with good capabilities for a snug garden; and as he looked and reflected, a smile of wondrous sweetness stole over his rugged countenance, transforming it to sudden beauty, as the rosy tints of sunset endue the rugged snowy Alps with a hue of warmth and softness.

But when ushered into the presence of the colonel and his daughter, the ease of his bearing was no more. He bowed stiffly, fumbled with the buckle which secured the basket, and, failing to unfasten it, pushed the strap over his head, tearing his hair with the half-

open buckle, and finally letting the pannier fall to the ground.

Pitying his *mauvaise honte*, which he attributed to his seclusion from good society, and consequent awe of himself, the colonel hastened to introduce the business in hand.

“Mr. Iveson, I was just going to send for you. I want your advice and assistance.”

“I shall be proud to serve you, sir. Is it about the ‘dead work’ that you would speak?”

“No. On further reflection I have decided to leave the mine as it is at present. My immediate object is to realise five hundred pounds, which might best be done by the sale of the Beechwood Farm.”

Iveson started, turned pale, then red, reflected a moment, and then ventured a remonstrance.

“Sir, I would entreat you not to sell

Beechwood. You will thereby ruin your property in this district. Do be advised in this, and raise the money on your Surrey estates. Five hundred pounds laid out here would bring you an interest of cent. per cent. in two years ; but if you do not choose to improve the property, I beseech you not to depauperize it."

"Forgive me, Mr. Iveson, if, in this matter, I presume to believe that I know my own business best," was the colonel's stiff reply.

"I beg you to forgive my presumption, sir. I should not have obtruded an opinion but for your flattering statement that you wished for my advice and assistance."

"Perhaps I should have spoken more truly if I had omitted the word 'advice,' Iveson," replied the colonel, with a conciliating smile. "You will, however, believe that I respect your judgment when I ask you to become my

agent for the whole of my property here, as well as the mine."

Iveson looked gratified.

"Then you have dismissed Stubbs?"

"I have. Will you accept his position?"

"Gladly, sir. But it is rather hard that the first use I have to make of my new responsibility is to sell the most promising part of the property."

The colonel looked fretted.

"Can you raise five hundred pounds elsewhere on this property?" he asked, petulantly.

"Not at once, certainly," replied Iveson, after a moment's thought. "At any rate," he added, "you will reserve the minerals?"

"Will the farm fetch five hundred pounds and costs, with that reserve?"

"I doubt it. Land does not sell well here. Beechwood is only valuable as accommodation

land to yourself, or to Smith, or to me."

"Ah! it joins your farm!"

"It does. There are fourteen acres, but the land is bad, and the present tenant has had hard work to pay twenty pounds rent. You see a purchaser looks rather at the interest for his money than at the acreage, so I fear five hundred pounds is the utmost you can expect."

"It is naught! it is naught! saith the buyer!" muttered Colonel Hilary, with a sarcastic quiver of his upper lip.

Richard Iveson flushed crimson, and met the colonel's eye with a stern glance.

"Sir," he said, "if I am to serve you, you must trust me. Anything that seems strange to you I will at once explain, fully and repeatedly, until your judgment is satisfied. But I cannot act under constant suspicion, and unless you can really put trust in me,

and dismiss from your mind the supposition that I am constantly speaking from interested motives, I would rather you sought another man both as agent and overlooker."

The colonel looked annoyed.

"You are unnecessarily peppery, Iveson. I don't mean any insult to you in my remarks, but when you have gone about in the world as long as I have, you will see self-interest is the ruling principle in men, and will feel no pain at being suspected of it. Be so good as to tell me now why you are so reluctant to sell Beechwood, and yet depreciate its value?"

"I am reluctant to sell it because I have strong reasons for believing that the main vein comes very near the surface in some parts of the higher field. I dwell on the poverty of the land, and the lowness of the rent, because I do not wish you to be disappointed in the sale."

“Humph! My final decision is to sell the land by auction on the earliest possible day.”

Iveson bowed, his cheeks flushed again, but he uttered no word. Elsie glided from the room.

“I will post up notices of the sale immediately. What is to be the reserve price?”

“There is to be no reserve price. The land is to be sold for what it will fetch.”

Iveson rose, swung his pannier lightly over his shoulder, replacing it with an ease and grace strangely in contrast with his awkward handling of it before.

“I will call upon you again in a few days, Colonel Hilary,” he said in a decided tone; “by that time you will have been able to take counsel with yourself whether you can trust me wholly or dispense with my services altogether.”

“Don’t bully me, Iveson,” replied the

colonel in a tremulous tone. "Can't you see that the battle of life has gone sorely against me, and that only a forlorn hope can save me? Your high tone would be manly with the world in general, but it is cruel to me. Ask my daughter if it is not so?"

He looked so ill and suffering, so dead beat in what he called the battle of life, that Iveson's heart yearned over him, and his voice and expression became at once gentle and tender.

"Forgive me, colonel. I am a rough man, and little tenderness has shone upon me from childhood. You shall not have to complain of me again."

The old man smiled, and gave his new agent his hand; and as Iveson left the room he trod as softly, and closed the door as gently, as if he feared to awake a sleeping child. In the hall he encountered Elsie.

“ I waited for you here, Mr. Iveson, to tell you that it is not mere obstinacy in papa that makes him insist on selling Beechwood. We have urgent need of £500. I cannot tell you why—though I may do so some other time,” she added, her confidence seemed so strongly invited by the look at once so frank and sympathetic now bent upon her. “ You wished us to raise the money elsewhere, and poor papa’s pride could not bear to give you the reason why he could not do so. Mr. Iveson, we have no estates but these—this ruined old house, these barren moors, and the poor little farm in question ; yet our honour requires that we should have £500 in a week.”

While she was speaking he had had leisure to observe how pale her face was, and how full of care was its expression. Now he replied—his voice as tender as when he soothed the father, but his manner quite robbed of its ease:

“I thank you for your confidence, Miss Hilary. Be assured the money shall be forthcoming. In the meanwhile, do take care of yourself. I mean use yourself as well as circumstances permit. You should have a garden. I have ventured to bring you some flowers off the moor.”

He began a fresh conflict with the pannier, which refused to come off at all for some time. When it did, it rolled down, knocking his hat out of his hand, and shooting into it four speckled trout, which had been carefully laid among wet grass; while a couple of snipes fell in another direction, and received the whole weight of some large sods of wild thyme and starry landwort upon their well-arranged plumage.

Elsie could have laughed, but for the evident pain the upset gave to the kind-hearted man. She helped to pick up the things, and

assured him that Barbara would not mind the deposit of loose earth in the hall. Eager to re-assure him, she accepted his offer of sending her ornamental stones from the mine for a rockery, and working for her sometimes when he had an hour to spare. He hurried away, not noticing her half-extended hand, eager to escape from the presence which so unnerved him, yet shuddering to find all the light and warmth had vanished from his life when the heavy old door shut him from her.

Elsie laid the trout and birds in a garden basket, then stole softly to the kitchen and possessed herself of Barbara's broom, with which she swept the scattered earth out of the doorway. Then she returned to her father, and found him almost fainting ; she persuaded him to go to bed, and proceeded to assist him upstairs. He seemed more broken than he

had been before, and clung to her as a child might do to its mother.

It was an hour in advance of their regular tea-time, but Elsie saw that her father was faint for want of food, having eaten nothing for many hours. She went to the kitchen to coax Barbara to broil one of Iveson's fish, but the kitchen was empty. Alas! it was "meeting" night, and the independent old woman had gone off, and taken the maid with her, without the compliment of referring the matter to her young mistress. But though Mrs. Hilary had fully believed her daughter would be the heiress of a large fortune, she had had her carefully instructed in all the mysteries of cooking and house-keeping, so the only inconvenience of Barbara's absence was that it took Elsie some time to collect her tools and materials. Her quick eye soon detected the frying-pan, and though

she sought longer for the butter, eggs, and bread, yet but a little time elapsed before the trout were hissing in the pan, together with the parsley so thoughtfully placed along with them in the unfortunate pannier.

As Elsie watched her father taking his meal with real appetite, she felt her heart lightened of half its care, and another portion vanished as she won a smile from him by a humorous description of the upset in the hall.

“That man is made up of strong contrasts,” said the colonel; “I shall study him as De Chaillu would the gorilla. He has a woman’s consideration and delicacy, with a ploughboy’s blundering awkwardness; and just when you are marvelling at his ignorance and gaucherie, he changes form again, and you behold a well-mannered gentleman and a scholar!”

CHAPTER VI.

SUNSHINE AND SHADE.

There's no dearth of kindness
In this world of ours ;
Only in our blindness
We gather thorns for flowers !
Outward we are spurning,
Trampling one another,
While we are inly yearning
At the name of brother !

GERALD MASSEY.

“WELL, this is kind. My sister-in-law has more regard for us all than I gave her credit for !” exclaimed Mrs. Aylmer, as she perused a letter which Mahala had brought in at breakfast-time.

Rose sprang to her mother's side, and leaning over her, tried to read the letter along with her; but Mrs. Aylmer folded it away, saying in a decided tone to Rose,

"No, my dear, your papa and I must talk this over before we lay it all open to you."

Rose gave her shoulders a petted shrug, and returned to her breakfast. Mr. Aylmer had finished his, so his wife asked him to help her to the garden seat. Isabel folded a shawl round her mother's shoulders, and then resumed her place, only waiting till the door should close to launch a reproof at her sister.

"Really, Rose, you should have more delicacy. If I had laid myself open by my own obtrusiveness to such a reproof from our mother, it would have made me miserable for the day."

"Fortunately for me, I am not so easily made miserable. I wonder what her lady-

ship's letter is about ! Perhaps it is something she offers for Herbert. I know that she and uncle are going abroad. I'll tell you what it is.—She offers to take Herbert a tour during the long vacation. Mamma has doubtless been fretting to her about the state of his health, and his severe study, and she so meets the difficulty. What a cruel bore it will be when the only pleasure we had to look forward to was his summer sojourn with us !”

“ Was his Easter sojourn such a happiness to you ?”

“ Now, Isabel, I do not believe there is another girl in England who has such a talent for bringing back disagreeable reminiscences as you have. You know very well that I was not happy with Herbert at Easter, but you might as well let me forget it.”

“ No, dear Rosie. We bring half our disappointments on ourselves by indulging in

groundless hopes. Herbert is safe when fully occupied, but leisure and change are dangerous to his fickle mind. I shall be very thankful if my aunt does take him abroad, and keep an eye on him during the long vacation."

At this moment her father's voice made itself heard, calling them to the garden.

Rose flew on the wings of curiosity, and Isabel followed quickly.

"My dears," said Mr. Aylmer, "your aunt proposes a great treat for you. She is going to spend the summer in Switzerland, and she invites you both to accompany her. Herbert is to join you sometime during the vacation, if he can be induced to remit his hard reading for a few weeks."

Rose bounded into the air like an antelope. Then she performed an airy dance round each bush, or group of bushes, on the lawn; pirouetting back to the covered seat where her

parents sat. By this process she had so far relieved her exuberant joy, that she was able to speak like other people, and she exclaimed,

“I believe I am the happiest girl in the three kingdoms!”

Mr. Aylmer had not failed to note the girl's mad joy; but he had been more closely regarding the countenance of his elder daughter. A flush of unmingled pleasure first appeared on her face, then one of disappointment, then a mental conflict cast its shadows on her countenance; but now it was all clear again, and she spoke for the first time.

“The plan is delightful for Rose and for Herbert; but I would rather remain at home.”

“But I would much rather you should go!” exclaimed her mother, eagerly. “You are getting peculiar, Isabel; it makes me very anxious to see a girl of your age lead such a

life of regular duty as you do. It is very ungirlish to be so calm—never speaking without due consideration—never acting but on fixed principles. I value religion, and all that—no one more, as you are fully aware ; but I like it to be full of feeling and heart—not stiff and stern, as you make it. I did not bring you up, taking such pains to keep your back straight and your complexion unfreckled, and to give you graceful manners, for you to become a Sister of Mercy, or a she-curate to your father. I destine you as a wife to a good gentlemanlike man, and hope to see you the mother of children as bonny as you once were yourself.”

Isabel’s cheek flushed deeply, as she bent her tall form to kiss her mother.

“I assure you, dear mother,” she said, “that I am anything but unwilling to realize the picture you have sketched, only I do not

feel the means to do so are in my hands. If God sends such gifts, I will take them thankfully; but in the meantime, all that is in my power is to do His will, so far as I can see it. And I do not feel that it can be His will that you should be left so long alone, while we are only seeking pleasure."

"It is undoubtedly God's will that you should obey your parents," said her father, gently laying his hand on the girl's shoulder. "I quite understand and value your unselfishness, Isabel; but your mother and I have fully considered all the objections that your sense of duty can urge, and we feel that they ought not for a moment to outweigh the advantages which the plan offers. You will be thrown into the society of your equals, your minds will be opened and developed by memories of the past, works of art, and variations in national and individual character;

and even if the tour should lead to no such restful bourne as your mother has depicted, it will yet do much to prepare you both for future life. We do not give you the choice, my children, we lay our commands upon you."

Isabel attempted no further opposition, but entered at once with her mother into the intricacies of the outfit, the result being that the pony was ordered for a trip to the town, where they should purchase needful things and secure the services of the dressmaker.

Rose, in the meanwhile, danced into the kitchen, startling Mahala with a small jewel-box in her hand. She blushed the kind of lurid crimson-colour which was always the mark of her deepest annoyance, and exclaimed—

"Miss Rose, you do run so terrible light, you do startle I out of my wits."

"Is that your brooch?" asked Rose, once more led astray by her thoughtless curiosity.

"Yes it be, Miss Rose," replied Mahala, doggedly. "Do you go for to think that because a girl is poor and ugly her hasn't no respect showed her! You be mistaken, Miss Rose. A servant as does her duty, and keeps herself respectable, and saves up her wages, and gives her cast clothes to her mother, has plenty to look at her, as many, maybe, as pretty young ladies who can't do nothing."

"Now, Mahala, don't be cross. I know you have a lover, and a very handsome one. Show me the brooch he gave you, and I'll wish you health to wear it?"

Mahala's countenance became more amiable, and she exhibited a pebble brooch big enough for a breast-plate, set in a rim like a gilt picture-frame. Rose took the brooch, glided

across the kitchen to where a small mirror was suspended from a nail; there she fitted the brooch against her own slender throat, the breadth of which it entirely covered. "A sweet thing in brooches!" she exclaimed, then returned it to its proud owner, saying,

"I wish you—

Health to wear it,
Strength to tear it,
And money to buy a new one!

Mahala, Isabel and I are going abroad!"

"Where is that, miss?"

"Over the sea. To France and Switzerland, where nobody speaks English, and all the ways of the people are different to ours."

"And what for be you going to such out-o'-the-way places, miss?"

"Sir Robert and Lady Aylmer are going, and have invited us to accompany them. We

shall be away all summer, and have such fun!"

"Will Mr. Herbert be going?"

"Yes. He will come home for a little time to cheer papa and mamma up, and then he will join us."

"And when will you be going?"

"This day week."

"Oh!" Mahala had entirely satisfied her curiosity, and wished no more of Rose's society, so she got her broom and began to sweep, kicking up such a dust that Rose was glad to beat her retreat. She ran up stairs, encountering Mercy with her housemaid's implements in the lobby.

"Mercy, Miss Isabel and I are going abroad."

The rosy hue faded out of Mercy's cheek as she gasped—

"Surely not to forrin parts, beyond the cruel sea, miss?"

“Yes, all that way, Mercy! And we shall be away all summer.”

Mercy burst into tears.

“Oh! Mercy, don’t cry! I’ll bring you back pictures, and a brooch as big as Mahala’s, and I’ll write you letters. And Mr. Herbert will be at home part of the time—and—oh! cheer up, Mercy. I can’t bear you to be unhappy.”

Mercy continued to sob, but was presently so far relieved as to be able to give utterance to her fears.

“Mahla be so cross, her do nag at I, till I be fair mazed. Her be so terrible fond of that butcher, that her be jealous if I do look into the kitchen, for fear him should chance to see I, and like I better than she.”

“Oh! Mercy, Mercy, where is the use of my teaching you grammar, if you will go on hashing your pronouns thus?”

“Please, miss, I be too grieved to mind the grammar, but I’ll take pains again when I be out o’ trouble.”

“Now, Mercy, I’ll tell you what you shall do: you shall write me letters. I’ll give you some paper and envelopes, and you shall write me all the news, and I’ll write to you. Won’t that be nice?”

Mercy smiled through her tears, but soon the cloud returned.

“Mahla won’t let I fetch the letters, her do insist on going for them herself; but, maybe, they won’t come of an afternoon, and then the postman will bring them, and I can meet him and see my own letter first.”

Mercy was now comforted, and Rose hastened to prepare for her excursion to the town. When the girls and Mr. Aylmer had driven off, Mahala presented herself before her mistress.

“You do look terrible tired, ma’am. Please to let me carry you to your room, you’ll get no sleep unless you let me shut you in and pull down the blinds?”

Mrs. Aylmer thankfully accepted the girl’s offer, and the broad set maiden carried her tall mistress with wondrous ease to her secluded chamber. She darkened the room, administered camphor julep, placed the smelling-bottle and bell-rope on the coverlet, and stole noiselessly away. Meeting Mercy, she regarded her sternly.

“Have you mended that carpet in Miss Rose’s room?” she asked.

Of course Mercy had not mended it.

“Then get the worsted bag and darn it this minute,” continued the elder sister; “if I do come up stairs in an hour’s time and it isn’t done, I’ll carry it straight to missis.”

Mercy hastened to perform her task; and

Mahala glided out of the back door and along the lane to the village, where she knew the carrier who brought the afternoon letters would have recently arrived. There were four for the Rectory, all of which Mahala put in her pocket. She glided back as quietly as she had come, then shut herself into the pantry to examine the letters, soliloquizing as she did so, “ ‘Miss Rose Aylmer,’—that is from Madame Eucrinaz. How pale those forriners do write ! There’ll be nothing but good advice in that. ‘Rev. H. Aylmer,’ and ‘Society for Propagation of the Gospel’ on the seal. That’s a printed thing, and doesn’t matter. ‘Mrs. Aylmer.’ That’s from the old governess, wanting to come here for a visit—I’ll look to that presently. ‘H. Aylmer, Esq.,’ and Oxford post-mark—why, what can this mean ?”

Here the abigail abruptly concluded her

soliloquy, acting on the stirring motto, "Deeds not words," for she hastened to the kitchen, tore off the lid of the kettle, and held a thin old knife in the boiling water.

"It's so ill-convenient of folks sealing their letters," she said; "it do give double trouble, and ain't no peertection after all."

When the thin blade was thoroughly heated, she dexterously cut off the entire top of the seal; then holding the back of the letter in the steam of the boiling kettle, the adhesion of the envelope soon gave way; she then withdrew the letter, and read as follows:

"DEAR AYLMEER,

"My father has sent me five hundred pounds to pay Dungarret, and my honour is saved once more. But I am broken-hearted. He forbids me ever to come into his presence again. What are you doing? It is a first

offence with you, and though your debts are heavy, you have wealthy friends. I hope you have returned home. I am sure, if my father were as merciful as yours, I should have done so. Merciful, did I say? My poor old father—true man and brave soldier, I have ruined him!—how dare I look for mercy from him now? Aylmer, you are younger than I, be warned by me, and own all to your father. This is the last letter you will get from me. Neither you nor any other whom I have known will see me again, unless in a debtor's prison.

“Yours,

“GEORGE HILARY.”

“There ain't no manner o' use in missis gettin' this letter,” said Mahala, resuming her soliloquy. “Mr. Herbert has been up to some pretty pranks, that's plain enough; and

also that he's runned away. But he ain't runned home ; and though the letter is good advice enough, there's no gettin' it to him. The only thing it could do would be to worry wissis, and prevent the young ladies gettin' out o' the way, so the fire had best have the keeping o' the secret."

She dropped it into the fire, opened and read Miss Wilkin's letter, and finding that it did not propose a visit, fastened it up again, and carried it along with the gospel propagation one, and that from Madame Eucrinaz to the dining-table, where letters were generally placed.

For three days her examination of the letters was doubly severe ; she made a point of meeting the morning postman, and keeping back any letter whose contents she could not at once guess ; if on perusal she thought it fit for the eye of her employers, she placed

it with the other innocuous letters which came by the next post.

On the third day she laid hand on the letter for which she was lying in wait. It was from Herbert's tutor, and informed his father with much regret of heavy debts contracted by the said Herbert, and spirited escapades enacted by him; and added that his misconduct had made it incumbent on the authorities to pass sentence of rustication upon him, but that he could nowhere be found to receive his sentence. The tutor hoped he had returned home, and that his father would not fail to set before him the enormity of his misdeeds, which paternal remonstrance he further trusted would have the effect of leading him back to paths of virtue, &c.

"Well, if I didn't think something particular would come to he!" exclaimed Mahala, as she closed the letter, and restored the envelope

to its former appearance. "T'ain't natural for a young chap like him to be so sanctified, allays a-giving of good advice, and never a-following of it. But t'would spoil all the young ladies pleasure if master got this here letter now ; yet him must get it before long. I'll keep it back till them are off to France and India. If they do stop at home, there'll be no holiday for I."

Mahala mused long and anxiously ; all the morning her soiled cap was pushed crooked on her large, roughly-formed head, and her manner was more morose than ever. Mercy kept out of her way, and Rose, having gone into the kitchen for something that she needed, and receiving no answer to her request, hastened to warn Isabel that Mahala looked dangerous, and they must begin to make her taste all the food in their presence before they partook of it themselves.

In the afternoon she watched the young ladies into the garden, then she deposited the letters on the extreme edge of the dining-room table, a piece of oil-cloth was laid across that end of the room, for a door on the other side communicated with Mr. Aylmer's study. Mahala carefully slipped the tutor's letter under this oil-cloth, which was certain not to be removed till the following Friday, and she trod heavily over the place to make the cloth lie flat. Mr. Aylmer entered the room as she stood there, but he only took up the letters off the table, selected one from his sister-in-law, and glanced his eye over it. Then he passed on to his study, and Mahala glided to the other door; he turned and said hastily :

“ I must take the young ladies up to London on Tuesday, Mahala ; Sir Robert and Lady Aylmer leave England early on Wednesday morning ; I shall return on Wednesday

night, and in my absence I must trust to you to take extra care of your mistress."

"I'll do my best, sir," was the meek reply.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION.

Temptation hath a music for all ears,
And mad ambition trumpeteth to all ;
And the ungovernable thought within
Will be in every bosom eloquent ;
But when the silence and the calm come on,
And the high seal of character is set,
We shall not all be similar.

N. B. WILLIS.

It was past the middle of June, and the weather was very sultry. In London animated nature seemed scarcely able to gasp during the hours of the day, but when evening came, humanity began to breathe again. A young man of dark complexion, and yet darker ex-

pression, scribbles the last sentence of some literary composition, and then rapidly reading it over, and making occasional corrections, he folds it together, ties a string around it, and resuming his coat and waistcoat, which he had thrown aside while in the agonies of authorship, he takes his hat and his manuscript, and sallies forth.

As he proceeds he once more weighs the merits and the chances of his work. His plot is bitter, daring, and, he believes, brilliant; but he knows that the ground is occupied, ay, crowded by contributors of name and fame, and he rejects the thought of offering his *brochure* to the "Cornhill," "Macmillan," "Household Words," or "Once A Week;" but a new magazine has started, and since its start passed from aristocratic to democratic hands, and he feels a strong hope that his talent may find a field of action. He passes Temple Bar, and hands in

his contribution at an adjacent publisher's. The usual answer is given, "It shall be forwarded to our reader," and the weary author resumes his walk.

Away to the Temple Gardens, or rather the open space beside the river, for he felt he had no right in the gardens. The sun is going down, but the air still flickers with the intense heat, and the sight of the river is refreshing; he has a few coppers in his pocket, so he takes a boat at the Temple pier and goes up to Chelsea. It is dark when he lands, at least as dark as it means to be that midsummer night, and he sits beside the river, enjoying the comparative solitude and quiet. Thought flows faster than the flowing tide, and in it he leaves the river, and the city, and the sultry south country behind, and fancies himself far away on the Yorkshire moors, by the side of a beautiful pale girl.

He takes a letter from his breast, and reads in a clear feminine hand: "The despairing tone of your letter gives me more anxiety than even our father's increased illness, dear George. You have no cause for despair. While you have a head and hands to work with, surely an honest life is possible to you. You need not even despair of our father's forgiveness—time will soften his just displeasure, if God only grant him time! Try to get work, George; seek it, and pray for it. Remember you cannot take a false step without plunging me in misery."

George Hilary covered his face with his hands, when he had read so far.

"Oh Elsie! Elsie!" he exclaimed, "you little know how impossible it is for a ruined man to get work. You little know how utterly helpless I am. I have kept back the worst of my debts from you—those that *must*

be paid this week you know nothing of. Oh! where is there a door open for escape? This dark river might help me, but it would not spare suffering to you."

No dawn came to his night of despair, no hope shone out amid the blackness. He rose and turned eastwards, pacing rapidly towards London, and always keeping by the river-side, where it was possible to do so. It was considerably past midnight when he reached the Strand, and heard a rich clear voice singing a passage from one of Handel's oratorios. He hastened forward, laid his hand on the arm of a slender young man, exclaiming:

"Herbert Aylmer, what are you doing here?"

The singing ceased, but the tones of the reply were flute-like in their clear harmony.

"Have you taken service as a blue-bottle,

Geordie, that you assail a fellow in this highly objectionable manner?"

"Don't trifle, Aylmer."

"Don't use that name, George, I have laid it aside with my good-boy manners. I am Launcelot Rivers, at your service."

"I did not think you would have stooped to the meanness of disowning your father's name."

"Humph! Do we keep our names so very clean, George, that our paternal ancestors owe us such gratitude for proclaiming our relationship?"

George bit his lip, and Herbert continued:

"Come in to my lodgings, old boy. You are dying of sulkiness, and look as fair a subject for a suicide as any coroner ever sat upon, only it is June instead of November, otherwise you couldn't help taking to the water."

Suiting the action to the word, he applied his latch-key, and led the way up several flights of stairs, at last entering a fairly comfortable room. George followed him mechanically, and, throwing himself into a seat, covered his face with his hands.

Herbert fidgeted about, turned the gas up till the room looked light as day, produced a bottle and glass from a cupboard, and then offered some refreshment to his friend.

“Come, old fellow, cheer up. It’s all bad enough, but there’s no use giving in like that.”

“It’s not easy to do otherwise, Herbert; that bill of Jacob’s comes due to-morrow, and I have not a single shilling towards renewing.”

Herbert’s slight shoulders advanced half an inch nearer his ears, and his white hands made a scarcely perceptible outward move-

ment. He was silent for a short time, and then said :

“Why not apply to Dungarret ? He rolls in wealth, he is a good-natured fellow, and he owes you some amends.”

“Amends ! The man is a blackleg and a scoundrel ! He has been the ruin of both of us. The only thing I would accept from him would be the satisfaction of a gentleman. The only thing I would take is *revenge* !”

“Revenge ! Ah ! that is like you. But the notion is a grand one—and—quite possible.”

“How ?” exclaimed George, eagerly.

“Do be calm, George, or I can’t feel it right to make any suggestions to you. You see I am in a somewhat painful position. Lord Dungarret is my friend ; he has already put me in the way of making a trifle—an allegorical sketch of faith, hope, and charity, with some soul-moving lines thereon, all the

work of your humble servant, found a ready and lucrative market, with his lordship's signature to them, and I am now living on the proceeds. He has also got me a job as a kind of anti-railway spy for the autumn, and the chance of something more permanent afterwards. So, you see, I cannot act against him; and if I go so far out of friendship for you as to drop the shadow of a hint, you must work it out for yourself."

"I see. Drop the shadow, then."

"Well. You must renew to-morrow. Where's the money?"

"That blackguard has swindled me out of it."

"Can't you answer more to the point. Where is the money?"

"In Lord Dungarret's pocket."

"Ah! Justice says it should come out of it, then; law says, 'Easier said than done;'

ingenuity says, 'As easy done as said!'"

"How, in the name of wonder?"

"Oh! I don't know! Look, there is a note of his lordship's. It struck me his writing was a good deal like yours. I tried to imitate his signature in case I wished to attach it to another work of art; but I did not succeed well—here it is!"

"A decided failure. You can't make thick upstrokes, which I do by nature. Look—that's the way!"

"Perfect! Now, old boy, I'll make you a present of that document of his lordship's, to sell to the autograph dealers, if you like, of course. I don't see any other purpose to which to put it. Now, no more on that head. Have some grog?"

George shuddered.

"No, Herbert, I won't taste it. What I do, I'll do sober."

All the time that this conversation lasted, Herbert's piercing eyes had by turns seemed to penetrate his friend's thoughts, and to search among the papers on the table. Never did they rest for five consecutive seconds on any object, yet never did any object seem safe for an instant from their scrutiny. He now offered his hand to his friend, and as George took it mechanically he started.

"Herbert, you are in a raging fever—your hand burns like a live coal."

Herbert snatched his hand away, laughed a mirthless laugh, and said carelessly—

"It's cooler than my head."

George laid his broad brown hand on the fair high brow, and felt its feverish throbbing.

"You are drinking hard, Herbert," he said, with a gentleness that was like Elsie's, "and you have no constitution for it. The gin palace and the opera suit your excitabi-

lity, but they will kill you. Go home to your mother."

"I cannot face my father's anger, and my mother's grief. No, George, I have not come to that."

"Let me fetch a doctor. You can pay him?"

"No, I can't. The remainder of 'Faith, Hope, and Charity' is due for my lodging. I have spent more than half to-night. There is soda water there, give me some, and leave me."

George did as desired, and regained his own poor lodging as the first beams of the rising sun began to gild the spires of the great city.

Though over-excited, and faint with hunger, yet George Hilary slept, and slept soundly, for some hours. When he awoke, he at once repaired to Fleet Street, in hopes that "the

reader" might have accepted his *novelette*. But there was no aristocratic signature to his *brochure*, and he was desired to "call again in a week."

But his need was for *to-day*. Hunger would not wait a week, still less would a usurer. How could he raise money? He would sell his possessions, only he had none to sell. Dungarret had robbed him, and ought to surrender the ill-got spoil—yet how compel him to do it? Willingly would he have seized him by the throat to demand restitution; he even called at his house to try what expostulation would avail, but was informed that "my Lord was gone abroad by last night's mail."

There was but one means, then, and goaded on by despair, he did the deed. A few minutes, and the bill was drawn, the false signature was attached, and Jacob willingly

accepted it in lieu of the old one, supplying the needful for the present into the bargain.

George hastened to his friend as soon as he had transacted his business, and found him raving in brain-fever. He called in a doctor, and then stopped at Charing Cross, and sent this message along the telegraph wires: "George Hilary to Rev. Aylmer. Your son is ill with brain-fever at 32, Wellington Street." He then resumed his place by the sick-bed of the sufferer.

By that evening's post Madame Eucrinaz received a letter, full of faithful affection, from Rose. It told of the delightful tour on which they were just starting, and of the pleasure which she and her sister anticipated from it; and then it detailed the honours which Herbert was expected to gain at college, and the high character he was supposed to bear there. And Madame Eucrinaz stood with compressed

lips, and eyes rapidly opening and shutting, and she looked at the garden-walk, and said :
“ It is just six months since I saw these children there, and my expectations of them are not beginning to be verified. I hope for once I have been mistaken in my judgment—at any rate, as far as the boy is concerned.” And Madame Eucrinaz went about her business, for her young people were separating for another holiday, and her summer was to be passed in Paris.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAILY ROUND.

The timid hand stretched out to aid
 A brother in his need.
 The kindly word in grief's dark hour,
 That proves the friend indeed.
 The plea for mercy, softly breathed,
 When justice threatens nigh ;
 The sorrow of a contrite heart—
 These things shall never die.

All the Year Round.

THE midsummer sun was shining as gloriously upon the Yorkshire hills as it did upon the roofs and spires of the great capital, but the vehemence of its rays was tempered by a fresh breeze, in which the moor butterflies danced,

and the dragon-flies darted hither and thither to the hum of bees and the song of the grass-hopper.

But neither sun nor breeze browned the fair cheek of Alice Hilary. Nature played for twenty hours out of the twenty-four, but during these long, brilliant hours the sad girl watched by a couch of pain. When the shock of George's liabilities first fell upon them, Alice feared that her father would have a stroke of paralysis, but that danger seemed now to have passed by. The only physical effect following upon the grief was a great increase of pain in the wounded arm, causing such torture as forbade the possibility of natural sleep, and so drained the sufferer's strength that he was often not equal to the exertion of coming down-stairs.

There was still very little going on in the mine, but Richard Iveson found plenty of em-

ployment, and Elsie seldom caught sight of him. One evening, however, old Barbara toiled up-stairs to say that "young Iveson" was below.

"Do you speak to him, Elsie?" whispered her father. "I do not feel equal to seeing him. Tell him, if he wants to see me, he must come early in the morning, when first the power of the opiate has passed off—you know when."

Alice hastened down, and found Mr. Iveson standing in the hall. He bowed stiffly, and asked in formal terms regarding the colonel's health.

"He is suffering terribly, and I feel sure something is wrong with the wound beyond what the village doctor understands. Do you know of any more experienced man whom I could call in, Mr. Iveson?"

The reserve and embarrassment passed from

Iveson's face like a cloud before the rising breeze, as he replied,

"There is no one hereabouts that I have any faith in ; but a schoolfellow of mine, now an eminent physician in Edinburgh, would see the intricacies of the case at a glance, and would afford alleviation if a cure should prove impossible. The colonel must see him."

"But—" and poor Elsie hesitated—hers was a brave spirit, but it takes a threefold courage to enable a high-bred gentlewoman to own to poverty—"but," she said, "are his terms very high? I should not grudge any sum, if I had it, but I have very little in the house ; every shilling of the Beechwood purchase money went at once, and I don't know when more may come in."

"Not till November," replied Iveson ; "and that brings me to the subject I came to speak about. I have had a good offer for the shoot-

ing this season, and I want to know if the colonel chooses to let it—I suppose it is out of the question that he should shoot himself?”

“Quite out of the question. But what is to be done about a house for the sportsmen? This house ought to be let with the moor.”

“An idea has struck me on that head which I want to submit to you.” Here the old embarrassment returned, and he fingered the brim of his hat, as a beggar might do who was pressing an ill-grounded claim for charity. “My house is a good size—the furniture is only plain—but—shooters could make shift with it—and I get very little change—there are good rooms over your stables—I could flit in there—give a holiday to my servant, and I should get change of air, and a different view of the moor. I hope you excuse my presumption, Miss Hilary?”

“ Really, Mr. Iveson, you surprise me. Do you actually mean to leave your house to these smoking shooters, and take up your abode for three months over our stables? I hope you will see that the strangers pay for their high privileges. We owe you warm thanks for getting over the difficulty for us.”

“ Then I may arrange it so without further appeal to the colonel? Thank you. Make yourself easy about the rent; be sure I will see that I am paid. You will receive two hundred pounds exclusive of the house, and the tenant will pay all the expenses of preserving, &c.”

Elsie looked relieved.

“ But, in the meanwhile, my father must have medical aid. Can you guess what your friend's fee will be?”

Again Iveson twirled his hat, stammered,

and looked as awkward as a big school-boy in a spelling class.

“Samson has promised to visit me,” he said. “Edinburgh is empty now, and a run on these moors would be worth a year’s income to him. I want a little setting to rights myself, too,” he continued, with added nervousness; “and it is very important that I should get it before the twelfth, or my hand will be unsteady. I will write to him, and get him over at once. His fee is one guinea.”

“Thank you so much. Your counsel and ready help are a great mercy to me in this time of trial, Mr. Iveson.”

She lifted her clear hazel eyes, all suffused with tears, to his face, and met a look of such melting tenderness, that her cheek flushed, and her eyes sank, while the tears already suffusing them rolled down her face, followed

by others melted from the overcharged heart by that look of sympathy.

Iveson muttered something about the room being close, turned to open a window, stumbled over his dog, who howled, and then asked pardon for howling. In caressing him he upset a high-backed oak chair, which, falling upon the fender, snapped clean across, and left the stately chair a mere stool; poker, shovel, and tongs each claimed its own share in the affray, and stood at various angles, entangled in the bars of the chair, or the openwork of the detached back. The sudden revulsion of feeling, the jarring discord, and the look of utter perplexity in poor Iveson's face, quite upset Elsie's self-command, and she laughed outright. She was sorry that she had done so, for he looked sadly pained.

"If the colonel can see me to-morrow morn-

ing," he said, with more than his original stiffness of manner, "I shall be glad to come at ten o'clock. And, Miss Hilary, it would be a kind and right action of you just to step across the moor while I sit with your father, and say a word of sympathy to Polly Smith, the gamekeeper's daughter. The poor lass is dying of consumption; her father is one of your people, and they look to you for such kindness as a mistress should show her servants."

Elsie blushed. The grave tone had in it an air of reproof, and she thought she traced the same in the words as well as the tone. She replied meekly that she would certainly pay the visit, not for a moment suspecting that her own pale cheek, suggesting her need of fresh air, was his sole reason for pressing the claims of the poor neighbour.

True to his promise, Richard Iveson arrived

at Thorny Hall at ten o'clock. Elsie led him at once to her father's room, and felt discouraged as to the effect of his visit on the invalid, when she found that he kicked each article of furniture in passing, upset a glass of lemonade placed on a table near the couch on to his own lap, and, miscalculating the height of the chair she placed for him beside the invalid, dropped down into it with a jerk, which shook the whole room. She was greatly surprised, therefore, on her return, when her father said :

“ You have surely not been an hour away, Elsie !” and added, after Iveson had taken his leave, “ That great hulking fellow is fit for a hospital nurse. He moves about the room as lightly as you do, and he knows by instinct exactly what one wants. His voice is like distant music, and his reading is better and more soothing than the sweetest song. Oh ! had George been like him !”

“It’s a long lane that has no turning,” whispered Elsie—“George may yet be a good man.”

“Not in my time,” was the reply, and Elsie was thankful that the tone was more sad than stern.

And how had she sped on her errand of charity? She had left the hall with a buoyant step, right glad to feel the breeze around her, all laden with flowery odours as it was. But what did she see in the sheltered nook?—a garden, surely! Yes, a well-watered garden. There was a border full of rich loam, and in it were pansies, and geraniums, with the sunlight playing round their scarlet blossoms like floating gold dust; and there was a little rockery formed of quaint glittering masses of spars from the mine, and mountain pansies nestled at its foot, while wild thyme and blue-eyed speedwell peered from the crevices, and

the hollows were filled with green mats of sandwort, all covered over with silver stars of blossom. She gazed enraptured on this fairy land, the very ideal of the desire she had felt obliged to abandon. She had no doubt whose work it all was, and she exclaimed audibly, with eyes full of grateful tears :

“How good and kind he is !”

She gathered a spray of geranium, and brooched it into her breast, then she pressed forward rapidly, knowing that she must not be long absent from her father.

As she went along she stooped from time to time to gather flowers, and had got together a nosegay of great beauty before she reached the small farm-house occupied by the keeper.

In answer to her knock the door was opened by a pretty-looking woman, who proved to be the mother of the sick girl.

“It’s Miss Hilary, Polly,” she said, in a drawling tone, as an introduction. “She’ll have come to see you because you are given over.”

“Polly does not look so very ill,” said Alice, as she took an offered seat near the invalid; “perhaps something may yet be found to do her good. Papa is going to have a great doctor from Edinburgh, and I’ll ask Mr. Iveson to bring him to see her.”

“Ay, ye may do that, Miss Hilary; it’ll be a satisfaction after all’s over. Young Iveson is a well-disposed man—very; his housekeeper is so keen after the blackbirds; folks say as she is a kind o’ cousin to him, but I don’t know—I never meddles nor makes in other folks business, and she plucked them, every feather off, and says I, ‘Nay, ye mun just nick up t’skin, and slip it off.’ I does game and everything that way—such a saving o’

trouble ; but then I have lived as cook in gentlemen's families."

Elsie could only answer, "Indeed !" for the address had rather confused her than otherwise ; she then reverted to the object of her visit, offering her flowers to the invalid.

"Nay, Miss Hilary," drawled the mother, "we reckon nowt o' weeds like them. I'll get ye a nosegay in t'garding worth smelling at. Gilly flowers, and marigolds, and lad's-love. And I'll get Polly one, too, so she can throw away them weeds."

"I like these best that the lady has brought," said Polly, but was prevented adding more by a tremendous fit of coughing.

"Ay, that's how she goes on !" resumed the mother ; "night and day—night and day—it's all the same. She used to sleep in a chamber close beside father and me, but we've moved her to t'other end o' t'house, for we

could not get any sleep for her cough. Yesterday she says, 'Mother, I'se break a blood-vessel in coughing one o' these days,' and I says, 'Ay, my lass, ye will, but not for a piece yet. Ye'll go on wasting for a tidy bit, and then t'vessel'll break, and ye'll not dally long then.' Jacob went so, and Nathan'll, maybe, take to like ways too, only he's so mean."

"Are these your own children, Mrs. Smith?" asked Elsie, considerably puzzled.

"Nay, these is his. Mine's at school. They went away just as I began to pick them berries. I've never solded berries before, but we've such a heap on them, and t'birds will get them for all that Joseph goes into t'end room at daybreak and fires out o' t'winder. Before he comed in to his fortin', I used to make a pie on 'em, allays with their skins off, for I had been a cook in gentlemen's families.

But I gives 'em away now to poor neighbours, and Iveson's housekeeper's terrible partial to them."

Elsie wondered why a man of "fortin" should trouble himself to serve as gamekeeper, and Mrs. Smith resumed as if in answer to her silent question.

"It ain't needful for Joseph to work, only for t'bairns, for old Nathan 'tailed t'property on his grandson Nathan, for all t'world only for t'sake of his bearing t'same name, and Nathan has been past biding ever sin. He'll be t'only one o' t'first family when Polly's laid in t'churchyard."

"I hope the clergyman comes to see Polly?"

"No, he can't do that, for Joseph has dismissed him. It's a pity, for I allays liked going to church nows and thens; I was used to it in gentlemen's families, and I felt it right to encourage the parson, and set an example

to one's inferiors. But he went and sided wi' Nathan, and tuk against Joseph about Jacob's dangles, and so we goes to chapel."

"Then the chapel minister visits Polly?"

"No, he doesn't. Joseph don't encourage no young men about the place. Polly does very well without. I'm sure I'm allays giving her good advice, and I reads a bit to her o' Sunday. Last Sunday I read her nearly all t' burial service; no, it was Sunday week, for she's been off her food since."

Elsie found it was absolutely impossible to get in a word to Polly, so she prepared to depart, promising to come again, and bring her some pieces for her patching, and wondering how she could have endured life so long within hearing of the tongue of such a step-mother.

Iveson looked grave when she complained of Mrs. Smith.

“She is a terrible scourge to that family,” he said. “Smith has a bad temper, and is very revengeful, but he has good points; Nathan is uppish but not wicked. But that woman is sowing the seeds of discord broadcast, and she will reap a terrible harvest ere long.”

CHAPTER IX.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT IN LONDON.

Gott, ich erkenne Dich,
So im herbstlichen Rauschen der Blätter,
Also in Schlachtendonnerwetter,
Urquell der Gnade, erkenn' ich Dich,
Vater du, segne mich!

KÖRNER.

MR. AYLMER reached home, as he had intended to do, late on the Wednesday night, and cheered his wife with a full account of Rose's glee at starting, and of the calm pleasure beaming in Isabel's eyes. He had seen them on board the packet; the weather was glorious, far too glorious for a railway journey, he

opined, and a pleasant sail was before them. They were going to travel leisurely, pausing for one or two nights here and there as fancy might dictate, and Sir Robert had pledged himself to keep out of reach of letters for a fortnight at least. All this was repeated to Mahala, as she waited on her mistress, and her cheek flushed at the last announcement.

Breakfast was later than usual on the Thursday morning, and as Mr. Aylmer entered the room, he perceived several letters lying on his plate. One with the Oxford postmark he opened first, and his look of dismay in reading it was the first shadow of evil that fell on his wife as she entered the room supported by Mahala.

“Oh ! Henry, what is the matter ? Surely Herbert is not ill ?”

“No, my dear, he is not,” was the reply, and a glance at Mahala warned her to ques-

tion no further in the presence of the abigail.

Mahala saw the glance and understood it fully as well as her mistress; she hastened from the room and closed the door, then, clenching her fist and scowling at the pair in council within, she muttered,

“You do think that a poor servant doesn’t ought to know secrets! You do think that her has only to work and be paid! Her’s not the fool you think, her isn’t.”

Mercy joined her sister in the kitchen.

“Missis be long in ringing for the breakfast to be brought away, and us do want our breakfast, Mahla, don’t us?”

Mahala gave no reply, but took an envelope from her pocket and doled out of it about a spoonful of tea; this she put in a pitcher, poured boiling water on it from her constant friend the kettle, and then set the jug on the top of the hot oven. She cut a slice of bread

and butter, pretty thick, quartered it and laid it on a plate. Then she brought a cup of milk from the pantry, and, diving into her pocket, drew forth a few loose lumps of sugar. All this was enacted in silence, Mercy watching with a puzzled air. Then Mahala seated herself at the table, jug in hand, and motioned Mercy to do likewise.

“What for don’t you wait for the parlour tea-pot?”

“’Cause it’ll be over-long in coming, and us be hungry.”

“Missis have been down this half-hour—why should us have so much longer to wait?”

“Master and missis have got something to disjest a deal unwholesomer than tea and toast, or even that coocumber and salmon what did make her in such a way a fortnight ago. They has forgot breakfast and everything, you may depend.”

“ Oh ! Mahla, what’s happened ? If anything’s come to the young ladies on the sea, I don’t want no breakfast neither,” and Mercy began to cry.

“ Ha’ done, will ’ee. Nothing’s happened to nobody. Only master was looking scared over a letter, and I do think it’s maybe from Master Herbert, that’s what I do think.”

“ But I can’t bide Mr. Herbert to be in trouble neither, he’s so terrible kind and handsome.”

“ Him’s not in trouble, not him. At least, not in half that him deserves. Now eat your breakfast, Mercy, like a good lass ; don’t ’ee know that it’s very bad manners for servants to be guessing and wondering what’s wrong with our betters ? Missis will be angry if I do tell her what you’ve been saying.”

“ Oh ! please don’t, Mahla.”

“Well, then, eat your breakfast, and look cheerful, and don't let 'em fancy as I've said anything to you.”

While all this was going on in the kitchen, Mr. Aylmer sat by his wife's easy chair, holding both her hands, and trying every means to soothe her grief. This was not easy, for Mrs. Aylmer was of the vehement impulsive order, not of the calm, reflective one.

She rocked backwards and forwards, weeping abundantly.

“It is all the fault of that good-for-nothing young Hilary!” she exclaimed. “I felt, from the first moment that my poor boy told me he had borrowed money from him, that he would be his evil genius. I begged him to try to influence his erring friend for good, and so threw him more into his society. Oh! that I had insisted on his breaking with him at once and for ever!”

“You acted for the best, Elizabeth; you wished to win for our son the reward promised to him that ‘turneth a sinner from the error of his ways.’ Alas! that Herbert should have been so easily led!”

“That I feel sure he was *not*,” eagerly interrupted the mother. “Herbert’s character is very decided *for himself*. It is only in his great wish to attract others that he is too indulgent. He tries to be like the Apostle Paul, ‘all things to all men,’ and goes too far.”

“Much too far! He must have been gambling to have incurred such heavy debt.”

“No, Henry; there you are unreasonable. I am sure Herbert would not touch dice. His false step has been in lending to that abominable Hilary!”

“Well, my dear, I hold it to be scarcely less dishonourable to lend money that you

have not got, or be surety for what you cannot supply, than to gamble away the same money in feverish, or perhaps drunken excitement. We cannot hide from ourselves that our boy has brought disgrace on himself, and misery on us. Would that I knew where he now is—I tremble lest he go from bad to worse !”

“ Thinking evil again, Henry, and of your only son ! Depend upon it, the poor boy is breaking his heart, perhaps starving in the woods, because he dare not come back to us !”

“ I think he will have gone to London. This letter would be written yesterday. Mr. Bousar speaks of him as having left Oxford, but does not say when he discovered his absence.”

Mr. Aylmer referred to the letter, and was more perplexed than ever on ascertaining the

date to be of eight days past. The post-mark corroborating this, he immediately rang the bell. It was answered promptly by Mahala.

“Mahala, did you take the letters from the postman this morning?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you notice them particularly?”

“No, sir.”

“Then you can’t remember anything in particular concerning this?” and he put the familiar envelope in her hand.

“I didn’t notice one more than another, sir. But as I was lifting the oilcloth this morning, I did find a letter that had got pushed underneath, and I put it on your plate with the other letters, but I can’t go for to say which letter it was, sir; it is all as a poor servant like me can do to spell out who the letter is for, without taking pains with the post-mark or eneeshals.”

“Look you, Mahala. The delay in the delivery of this letter may have very lamentable results. Lest such a thing should occur again, mind you put the letters in the card-basket in my study, never lay them on a table in a thorough draught. Don't suppose I blame you on this occasion; if it did not strike me that the place for the letters was unsafe, it was not to be expected that it should strike you. You may go.”

No change had taken place in the phlegmatic expression of the girl's face as she stood before her master, but her step along the passage was quicker than usual, and her countenance less gloomy as she entered the kitchen.

The father and mother sat long in consultation, longing to do something, yet not knowing what. Dinner time passed, and Mahala brought beautifully-cooked mutton chops, on a tray.

“Missis didn’t order nothing,” she said; “but maybe she would eat a mouthful or two, it would do her good, if she could get it down.”

“Missis” tried, but failed, and soon after the tray disappeared a telegraph boy arrived with the message from George Hilary.

Mr. Aylmer felt rather relieved than otherwise. With an unimpaired constitution, he trusted his son might overcome the disease, and his moral nature be greatly benefited by the discipline laid on him by his heavenly Father. But Mrs. Aylmer saw no hope for his recovery in this life, nor his salvation in the next; and her husband, compelled to start for London by the night train, had to leave her un comforted to the care of Mahala and Mercy.

The latter wept as despairingly as her mistress, and Mahala with difficulty withheld

herself from beating her. She did lock her up in her bed-room without supper, and mentally promise her further punishment on the morrow. Then she went to her cupboard, and took out a bottle of laudanum, which she had got as an antidote to toothache, and with it she repaired to her mistress's room. She gained the lady's consent to swallow a glass of camphor julep, and having poured it out, she added forty drops from her own bottle. The distracted mother swallowed it unhesitatingly, and Mahala had soon the satisfaction of seeing her drop asleep. Then she took the keys out of her pocket, and proceeded to examine all her locked drawers, her desk, and jewel-case. She produced a number of odd keys from her own pocket, and fitted them to the different locks, ascertaining that they would open the most important. She took the liberty of transferring the valuables to

such places as her keys would open, and when she had concluded her examination, she lay down on the sofa, and fell asleep, the opiate working too effectively to leave any fear of Mahala's snores arousing her mistress.

All that night George Hilary sat by his suffering friend. It was an awful night to him, yet he could not avoid the ordeal. His conscience burdened by crime of a more distinct nature than any he had yet perpetrated, he lived in momentary expectation of the vengeance of outraged law. He intended to have left London—England—as soon as he had seen Herbert; but to leave him alone, and in poverty, while disabled by delirium, was a depth of selfishness far deeper than George could endure. The doctor prescribed fever medicine, had the fair locks shorn, and bid the nurse apply cooling lotion to the head continually. Herbert raved, now about terrors

of this world, and then about terrors of the world to come ; then he would lie quiet for a time, only to burst forth suddenly in wilder ravings than ever.

The air was heavy, and felt as if sin-laden. You might have supposed that all the thoughts of care and grief, the sighs of discouragement, the groans of despair, and the cruel plottings of self had risen but fifty feet from the earth which steamed them forth, and then hovered in the air, filling attic rooms, especially the one where the two victims of self-indulgence dragged out that midsummer night together.

Herbert lies more quiet now, and George hears all the city clocks strike one, to the accompaniment of the chimes of Big Ben of Westminster ; he gently places anew cool bandages on the throbbing head, and yields to his musings.

If once he could get clear of England, and

gain the means of living ever so humbly elsewhere, he would then write to Elsie and confess all ; and he would save every shilling he could spare towards repaying Lord Dungarret the money he had filched from him by the forgery of the morning. If——

But his meditations were interrupted by Herbert, who started straight up in bed, and laying a hand burning like a live coal on his arm, pointed forward with the other, staring in the same direction till his eyes seemed verily starting from his head.

“Tick, tick, tick,” went a mysterious sound, like the ticking of a watch ; but George knew that Herbert’s watch was in the other room, and his own—he had parted with that some days ago.

“Tick, tick, tick,” went the strange imitation of clock-work ; and Herbert cried,

“Hush ! listen ! I hear something far off.

Something is coming, something is going to happen !”

He went on in a crescendo style, so low and soft at first, but culminating in a shriek.

“Something is going to happen ! It is misery, pain, grief, and—and—and perhaps murder !”

Again the silence and the strained attention.

“It comes nearer !” he whispered softly ; then raising his tone as he proceeded, “it comes nearer, nearer—I begin to feel as well as hear it—it is in the house—it entered at that moment—it is grief, horror, *murder* !”

He clung convulsively to George, still watching the door with strained eye-balls. At another time George might have ascribed all this to mere delirium ; but with a crime fresh on his mind he was as superstitious as any

innate coward. And all the while the noise of the ticking went on.

The clocks chimed two in parts and chorus ; Herbert moaned dumbly ; George put ice between his lips, and fresh lotion on his head, and in every pause of his duties he heard the ticking as before. The gray dawn stole over the city, putting the yellow gas-light to shame, and a faint breeze rose from the river which seemed to break a way through the oppressive mist of care and evil which had hung over the town all night. The watcher had leisure for thought, and he wove many a new resolution ; while again and again the image of his patient, long-suffering sister rose before his eyes, the beauty and power of her love raising his desires towards a purer life, and opening a way to it, as if it, like the morning breeze, could cleave the mist of sin and woe.

The world began to awake to a fresh day's

life, and market carts to throng to Covent Garden. Then the wheels of a cab were heard approaching rapidly, and the angel watchers rejoiced, and the spirits of evil shrunk away abashed, for one came treading in the steps of the Redeemer of our race—a father hastening with outstretched arms to reclaim the prodigal.

CHAPTER X.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT ON THE MOORS.

My lady walks as I have watched a swan
Swim where a glory on the water shone :

There ends of willow branches ride,
Quivering on the flowing tide
By the deep river's side.

We wander forth unconsciously, because
The azure calmness of the evening draws :

When sober hues pervade the ground,
And universal life is drowned
Into hush'd depths of sound.

WOOLNER.

SUNSET upon the moors. Each brown hill
shading from bronze to gold, while the rocks
cast dark shadows, looking like gigantic

lions couchant. No dearth of air here, no oppressive heat, for the foliage near Thorny Hall flutters incessantly as the evening breeze lightly stirs each branch and leaflet. But Alice Hilary stands at the window of her father's room, very pale and with intense anxiety in her countenance, and she listens as intently as her brother had done during his watch the preceding night.

The small hands are clasped, and though no word nor even sigh breaks the silence, an entreating prayer goes up to God that wisdom may be given to the physician, and to the patient strength according to his day.

Two hours earlier in the evening a dog-cart might have been seen waiting at the railway station at Swaleford, while Richard Iveson paced up and down expectant. The train steamed in in due time, and from a first-class carriage a short stout man alighted. His first

appearance, as he looked round in search of his friend, reminded you strangely of a sky terrier, his shaggy hair hung over his eyes, and gave them that brilliant far-seeing expression which we so much admire in the dogs in question. But as he grasped Iveson's hand, he took off his hat, and, by a characteristic jerk of the head, threw back the hanging locks, and then you could see that the brow was magnificently formed, and every reasoning faculty developed in full proportion, while benevolence sat as the crown of perfection of them all.

“Let us start at once,” said the physician ;
“daylight will not wait for us.”

And he bustled out of the station.

Iveson looked narrowly at each passenger who had arrived by the train. He knew most of them, for they were Swaleford people returning from the neighbouring market. At last, in his search, he encountered a pair of

large hazel eyes, and though they bore a stern expression, and were accompanied by dark hair and complexion, yet he could not doubt their relationship.

“Mr. Hilary, I believe,” he said.

George started, and looked at once fierce and alarmed.

“Nonsense, sir,” said Richard Iveson ; “I am your father’s agent, I have come here to meet Dr. Samson, and your sister suggested that I should be on the look-out for you also.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied George ; but as his mind grew more easy, a deep sadness made itself heard in his voice, and the languor consequent on his recent agitation and watching was expressed in his step and manner.

Dr. Samson was waiting impatiently, his bag in hand.

“Come Iveson,” he said, “time flies.”

“I merely waited for Mr. Hilary,” rejoined his friend.

The doctor wheeled round and faced George, he extended his hand.

“I am glad you have come, sir, you will be a comfort to your father and sister, and consequently a great help to me.”

George did not take the proffered hand.

“I will not accept your civility, sir, for it is offered to a dutiful son, not to a renegade. I go to Thorny Hall at my sister’s desire ; but I shall not be permitted to see my father, he may not even know that I am there.”

Dr. Samson’s brow grew stern, but George heeded it not, and they got into the dog-cart without further parley.

As George had come along by the train, he had noticed how brown and parched the fields looked, and how dull the foliage had become because of the long continuance of hot wea-

ther ; but, as Mr. Iveson's good horse carried them along the hilly roads towards Botcherdale, the grass was standing in thick ranks, or heaped in fragrant hay trusses, the leaves of the trees shone as if newly washed and polished, and danced with delight at their approach, while a rushing stream, all brown-stained from its springs among heaths and peat bogs, sang liquid songs, now grave, now gay, as it accompanied their journey.

The doctor was charmed with the beauty, and chatted merrily every foot of the way ; and George sat silent, contrasting his own sad and sin-burdened heart with the freshness and peace around him, and longing for any means, however humble or difficult, to enable him to return to the path of virtue he had left,

At the foot of the last hill Richard checked his horse.

“The path along those fields leads to my house, Mr. Hilary. Had you not better go there than to the Hall?”

George coloured deeply.

“Could I not go nearer, under the shelter of some wood, so as to be within reach of my sister, without incurring any danger of my vicinity becoming known to my father?”

“That is quite possible. Enter this wood and skirt along the top till you come to the Druid’s cave, a few grey rocks grouped together. Wait there for a signal. And take the *Times* to read meanwhile.”

George nodded, and ran along the wood, and the dog-cart proceeded up the lane. As it emerged, Elsie saw it from her waiting place, and saying gently, “They are coming now,” she glided down to receive them.

Dr. Samson had already sprung to the ground; as Elsie appeared he advanced to

meet her, and taking her hand in both of his, he said,

“Keep up your courage, and trust in God, my dear young lady.”

Elsie thanked him with a smile, and turning towards Mr. Iveson, she extended her hand to him ; but he was unloosing the harness, and so did not see it, but only said very gravely and respectfully,

“I hope the colonel is no worse this evening, Miss Hilary ?”

“Not any worse, thank you,” she replied. Then approaching nearer she asked, “Did you bring me nothing else from the station ?”

“Yes, I brought your brother. He waits in the Druid's cave.”

Again her eyes thanked him, as they had done once before, and again a turmoil arose in his whole nature ; the hills seemed to draw

near and make mouths at him ; the pebbles on the walk to enlarge and retreat to a distance ; his hands and feet grew cold, his head hot, a choking came in his throat, and he began to make spasmodic efforts to re-fasten all the buckles of the harness. Elsie with her keen observation saw it all, but was wholly unsuspecting of the cause of his embarrassment. She turned to accompany the doctor to her father's room ; and Iveson felt as if plunged into a cold bath, which restored his senses, and enabled him to take the horse out of the carriage, and lead him to the stable.

The colonel was perfectly calm during the examination of the wound, and, as the doctor held his pulse, he felt assured that he might safely answer his questions. So he told him that an operation was necessary to remove a portion of diseased bone, but that he should do it under chloroform.

"I am no coward, doctor—I can bear pain, if it be God's will."

"But it is *not* God's will, sir. Your head, heart, and lungs are perfectly sound. No risk is incurred by the use of the anodyne; while to inflict so much pain in your exhausted state would entail great risk. When God gives an alleviation, I think it is the height of ingratitude to refuse it."

"I shall be most thankful to be spared the suffering."

"You will know no suffering. I must have the aid of your regular attendant and of one other."

He glanced at Elsie, and the colonel read his thought.

"Not my daughter, sir. The suffering of which I shall be unconscious would be real to her. Our kind friend Iveson will give his aid, I have no doubt."

“ Ah ! that will do. Now you must rest. And, remember, I assure you, in God’s sight, you will *suffer* nothing, and incur no risk.”

When the doctor and Elsie descended, they found Iveson waiting below. He looked extremely gratified when the colonel’s remark was repeated, and readily promised to be present on the morrow. He then hastened Samson away, well knowing that Elsie was longing to repair to the Druid’s cave.

George had easily found the cave, and sat down there to glance over the newspaper. The first name that met his eye was that of Lord Dungarret, in connection with some sporting match which was to come off on the morrow. Then he had not gone abroad ! Poor George felt the solid earth shake under him ; all the horrors of the last night came back to his memory ; what if Herbert’s delirium should have partaken of the nature of

clairvoyance, and evil be about to fall on his head! What if he should be arrested here! What could seem more natural to the police than to seek him on his father's property? And if he should be arrested, what would be the result? What grief and shame to Elsie, what mortification and dismay to the old man! Perhaps, in his critical state, it might have fatal effects. And George fancied he could hear again the crescendo wail of his friend, "pain, grief, murder!" He listened to the sighing of the wind among the firs in the dell, and to the gurgling of the brook which traversed its depths, and again and again he fancied the sound of steps and hushed voices mingled with the speech of nature. At last he was certain that some one was approaching; and this time he was not mistaken, for Elsie entered the cave; and threw herself into his arms.

All the conflicting feelings which had raged so cruel a warfare in his heart during the last six-and-thirty hours seemed commanded into silence by that touch of love, and George burst into tears.

“Don’t grieve, darling,” whispered Elsie. “Dr. Samson says a piece of bone must be removed, but he will give papa chloroform, and you shall stay with me while it is done. He says there is no risk whatever of evil consequences.”

“Thank God for that !” exclaimed George, seating himself upon the rock, and covering his face with his hands. “But oh ! Elsie, I am a guilty wretch. I have committed a fresh crime, and one that places me within reach of the law. I may be apprehended any time.”

Poor Elsie was thankful for the support of the grey masses of millstone. She groaned in bitterness of spirit—hitherto she had borne

all bravely, in the hope of saving him, and now he was more deeply stained than ever.

“Is it debt again?” she asked despairingly.

“Worse !”

She became deadly pale ; twice she essayed to speak, and her parched lips refused to utter a sound. At last she managed to articulate her entreaty.

“Tell me the worst, the very worst. I can bear that better than suspense.”

A moment's brooding silence, then one word issued from between the clenched teeth of the young man.

“Forgery !”

“God help us !” ejaculated Elsie. “You are in terrible danger here ; this is the place where they will first seek you. You ought not to stay, even for the decision of to-morrow.”

"I must, Alice. I cannot bear to leave without knowing the result of the operation. Can you contrive no disguise for me?"

"I cannot, Goorge. But I know one who will help us. Dear kind Mr. Iveson will conceal you."

"What! the agent?"

"Yes, he is so good and kind, and papa is so fond of him. You must not laugh at his gaucheries, for he is so helpful. Come with me to him."

"But Dr. Samson will see me!"

"Has he not done so already?"

"True. Then we will go to Iveson's house."

It was the first time that Elsie had been in that direction, but George led the way, guided by the simple directions which the agent had given him. The path, after skirting the edge of the wood for some distance, led upwards

towards the moor, then passed through a little grove of birch-trees, and ended at a garden gate. A strongly-built grey house stood in this garden, the principal windows looking south, while a quaint gable turned its solemn pair of eyes eastwards towards the rich valley, along which the Botcher led its serpentine way. The southern view looked upon the little wooded dell through which they had come, brown moors, and grey crags beyond, and quaint groups of Scotch firs, now dimly perceptible against the darkening sky.

A gay flower-garden lay before the windows, and to the back of the house were farm buildings and a fruit garden. The windows were all open, and as they entered the garden, Iveson heard their steps, and, apologizing to Doctor Samson, left the dinner table to join them.

He was advancing to welcome Elsie with more than his wonted awkwardness, when the sight of her pallid face, so expressive of extreme misery, at once banished his painful self-consciousness, and he said gently to her—

“Dr. Samson is very hopeful about his patient.”

She smiled faintly, then said—

“I want your advice and help in a very grievous matter, Mr. Iveson. Will you take me somewhere where there is no possibility of our conversation being overheard.”

“Come to the summer-house,” he said; “I have only one servant about the place, at present, and she is in the agonies of sending in dinner to a gentleman I have described as a very great man. Mr. Hilary, will you join my friend at dinner?”

George glanced doubtfully at Elsie.

“Yes,” she replied to his questioning look; “go and eat—you will need the support. I shall in the meanwhile confide wholly in Mr. Iveson.”

As they proceeded along the hilly path to the summer-house above, Elsie stumbled. Richard mechanically caught her arm, and found that she was trembling. This gave him nerve to do what afterwards seemed to him the height of daring presumption—place the trembling hand on his arm, and support her as tenderly as her brother might have done.

“It is about my brother that I am in grief, Mr. Iveson,” she said, when they were seated in the summer-house, speaking rapidly—the faster to get over what was such terrible humiliation to her to tell. “Poor George was educated at Eton, and got very grand notions and expensive tastes. He never could deny himself anything, and he has been

so extravagant at college, that he has ruined my father. We fully believed that that five hundred pounds was the last of his debts, and my father insisted on paying it, to save George's honour and his own; but he vowed never again to see him. I told George all this, dwelling on the absolute impossibility of raising more money, to deter him from further wastefulness. Alas! there was a second sum due to the cruel gambler who had cheated him out of this; and he paid it by drawing a ruinous bill. As this came due he saw no way of meeting his liability but by forging the name of the man who had ruined him, and whom he supposed to have gone abroad. He finds now that he is still in England, and of course he may put the officers of justice on George's track at any moment."

Iveson listened with compressed lips, feel-

ing too deeply for the humiliation of the sister to express one iota of his righteous indignation against the self-indulgent prodigal.

“He is in double danger here, for his father’s house will be accounted the most likely place to seek him in. Stay, he must pass as Samson’s assistant ; he arrived along with him, and shall go back with him to Swaleford to-morrow. He will come with us to your house in the morning, and even Mrs. Barbara need not know whether he assists in the operation or remains in the ante-room.”

“Excellent, so far. But will Dr. Samson connive at the fraud?”

Poor Elsie shuddered at the word she had so aptly used.

“I will arrange with him. Mr. Hilary must take out a ticket to Edinburgh, and I will take one to Slayton, and give it also to him. He must get out at Slayton, and cross

the hills to this place. I can then conceal him easily in the mine."

Elsie's heart bounded. It was the first practical hope she had seen. All the refuges she had thought of seemed shallow in the extreme; but that mine, with its dark corridors branching in every direction, where every noise was multiplied into a roar by a hundred echoes—there surely he would be guarded both from force and from any sudden surprise. She clasped Richard Iveson's hand in both of hers, and, yielding to the long-pent up feeling, sobbed her thanks.

Fortunately for him there was no need for him to speak. That touch had shot a thrill through his whole nature which was making every pulse throb—he longed to clasp her in his arms, if death the next minute should be the award of his temerity. Death! A dozen deaths would have appalled him less than the

danger of startling her, or causing her to repent the confidence she had placed in him. So while she wept he gathered strength for self-control, and presently, releasing his hand, he said, very quietly and gently :

“Let me take you home—the colonel will wonder at your absence.”

“Indeed he will ! How glad I am you have reminded me.”

And she rose to go.

It was quite dark now, and the breeze was chilly. Iveson fetched a plaid from the house, an old plaid which the doctor had brought, and thrown on the table in the quaint entrance-hall. He wrapped it round her, and led her home in silence. As they reached the Hall, she whispered,

“You will not be harsh to George?”

“For your sake, no !” he replied, and lifted the old shawl off her shoulders.

She put her hand into his as she said good-night, and he would not allow himself the luxury of pressing it. As Barbara lighted her up-stairs, she thought, "How very, very kind Mr. Iveson is, but how cold!" And the old woman thought, "Poor young thing, she's been bothering the doctor all this time about her father. I wish she mayn't have put him out, so that he does his work ill-natured like to-morrow."

And Richard Iveson carried the old shawl strained closely to his breast, and when he reached home, he locked it away among the papers in his father's strong box. Of course it could nowhere be found when Samson wanted it, but Iveson gave him a new one of his own in its place, and the good little doctor by no means objected to the exchange.

CHAPTER XI.

TREASURE HIDDEN IN THE DEPTHS.

But who his limbs with labour, and his mynd

Behaves with cares cannot so easy miss.

Abroad in arms, at home in studious kynd,

Who seekes with painfull toil, shall Honor soonest fynd.

SPENCER'S *Fairy Queen*.

“ WELL, Iveson, I little thought to find myself in such a kettle of fish of your brewing !” exclaimed Dr. Samson, as the two friends sat smoking at the open window late into the night, with no more light than that shed by the stars, and the glimmer of their own pipes.

“As little did I think to be mixed up in such affairs!” replied Richard Iveson; “but what else is to be done? No fellow with the spirit of a mouse, much less that of a man, could let ruin overwhelm that noble old officer and—his daughter—while his energy, or even life, could stave off the blow.”

“No, no—it must be done! And there is good in the lad, too! It is hopeful when one sees a fellow so thoroughly ashamed of himself. I wish I could take him back with me, and make a medical student of him in earnest; a little insight into the real woes of humanity might do much to steady him; but that is not to be thought of—he must lie quiet for many a month.”

“I fear so. He will never be safe until the blackleg is paid in full.”

“And I suppose the old gentleman won’t do it!”

"He can't. He has sold all but the moors, and though they bring in a fair rental, they would not sell well. Besides, it is all the father and daughter have to live on."

"You amaze me. That girl, with her quiet grace, has the air of a duchess."

Iveson's eyes glowed more genially than the bowl of his pipe, but Samson did not see them; he continued to speak of the colonel.

"They had large estates in the south, but this scapegrace has ruined them inch by inch, and how to raise this six hundred pounds beats my ingenuity."

"I say, Iveson, did these people ever live in Edinburgh?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Find out. I must get hold of some excuse for taking no fee. It would wound their pride if I refused it without excuse."

"Miss Hilary is wholly ignorant on such

matters. I have persuaded her that your fee is only one guinea, and she has that ready for you ; the only sovereign in the house, I verily believe."

" Poor child ! Poor dear child !" ejaculated the doctor ; and a certain huskiness in his voice suggested that the eyes would look hazy if there were light enough to see them. " Is there nothing she could do ?" he continued. " Can't she make pictures, or do music, or make money somehow ?"

" I don't know. I should not like to suggest it."

" Phoo ! You used to be far more practical. Your mines won't flourish if you use the same timid policy in dealing with them."

" They don't flourish. We have been obliged to close the mine ; the vein has thinned out, and we have no capital for dead work."

" Bad, very bad ! Your circulation wants

stimulating. Upon the whole, I think this forgery will bring you good, forcing you to an effort. Miss Hilary must do something, and you must do something, and Mr. George must do something. I don't care if you only each earn sixpence a day, it will be an effort in the right direction.

Thus the friends chatted a while longer, and then the doctor retired to rest, the morrow's work in no degree disturbing his sleep.

The Botcherdale doctor was summoned during the night to a farmer's wife at the head of the dale, so Dr. Samson was obliged to begin his work with only one assistant, George promising to come to his aid as soon as Iveson should sign to him that the chloroform was in operation.

George Hilary's character was not altogether bad—whose character is?—but the keystone of his vices was self-indulgence. At

the present crisis it was impossible to blind himself to the misery which his misconduct had brought on his father and sister, and no more bitter lesson could have been forced on his attention by the most ingenious of inquisitors than was conveyed by what he now saw.

The faint moaning of the invalid during the whole period of the operation conveyed the idea that he was suffering keenly, though, to the matured experience of the operator, it was but the natural effect of the sleep into which he was thrown. Poor Elsie heard it in the adjoining room, and knelt with clasped hands, beseeching the aid of Him "who bore our infirmities and carried our sicknesses," while drops of perspiration trickled down her brow. George strung up every nerve to render assistance to the doctor, afraid lest any awkwardness of his should prolong his father's agony ; but his

heart was full to bursting, and he gazed on the reverend grey hairs of his father with true love and penitence. In that hour of controlled agony he forswore his past errors, and vowed solemnly to God to live only to obtain his father's forgiveness, and to tend his old age.

At length the operation was complete, the bandages were perfectly fixed, the moaning ceased, and George, for one moment pressing his lips on his father's hand, glided to the adjoining room, where he found Elsie lying on the floor in a dead faint. He took her in his arms and carried her into the corridor, and, seeing a door open at some distance, he conveyed her thither, guessing rightly that it was her own room. He laid her on the bed, bathed her face and hands, and when she looked up assured her that all was well over. She threw her arms round him, and abundant tears came to her relief.

His tears mingled with hers, and he poured out all his broken-hearted penitence—his earnest resolves. She listened, and thanked God ; assured him of her faith in his sincerity, and her sure hope of his amendment, and then left him to return to her father. It was only then that she remembered that George was supposed to be the doctor's assistant, and that if Barbara saw him emerge from her room she might be scandalised. She need have had no fears on that head, for Barbara was locked in the empty cellar, whither she had repaired as soon as the doctor entered.

“ For fear,” she said, “ that I should hear the old gentleman skrike when they pull the bone out of his arm, and it should come back to me o' nights.”

Elsie found her father composed and easy, and quite ready for some refreshment. Dr. Samson, and his two attendants, then left for

a walk on the moors, and a visit to Polly Smith, promising to return to the colonel in a few hours. When they did so, Dr. Samson drew Alice aside.

“Your father is doing excellently well, Miss Hilary. Pray did you not once sojourn in Edinburgh?”

“Yes, when I was a baby.”

“And you got your bread from Neilson?”

“I daresay we did.”

“To be sure. I was apprentice to the baker then, and always brought your father his morning rolls and scones. No, no, my dear, no fee. I never take fees from old customers. Besides, you see I have thoroughly got into the politics of your family, having accepted your brother as my assistant. He would do well as a medical student in earnest, but that money must be paid first. Can you not earn it?”

“ Oh ! how ?—how ? I would so gladly do it.”

“ Can you draw ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Paint some pictures. Paint one of Iveson’s house—two, three, of them. I will sell them to his Glasgow admirers. Paint views on these moors—the brook, the crags, anything—you are half-drowned in subjects. Paint out of doors every day as long as you can leave your father. Soon he will be able to go with you.”

“ But he does not know of George’s worst misconduct. Ought I to tell him ?”

“ By no means. Hide it from him for ever, if possible. Say, when he asks questions, that you are painting for me.”

Elsie gave him a look eloquent with gratitude. The doctor nodded, and began to whistle.

"Please tell me what you think of Mary Smith?" she said.

The doctor shook his head.

"Diseased lungs—no hope," he said. Then he added, "And still less for Xantippe."

"Is she so ill?"

"Madam, her tongue is truly a 'fire set on fire of hell, full of deadly poison;' and she feels herself a saint, and would patronise the very apostles, if they now stood on earth. Don't put anything belonging to that woman into your pictures."

Elsie promised to avoid the Raven's Nest, and the kind doctor took his leave.

By the night train Dr. Samson and his assistant left Swaleford Station for Edinburgh, and one or two of the townspeople lingered in the station to get a glimpse of the famous doctor, who, from being a mere baker's boy, had risen, by the strength of God's blessed

gift of wisdom, to be the most successful healer of men in the three kingdoms. Little interest attached to his attendant; and when the train had started, both the strangers vanished from the memory as well as from the sight of the spectators.

George left the train at the first station, and striking across the hills bore in the direction of the scar-topped height above Iveson's house.

Richard Iveson drove leisurely homewards, stopping to speak to the gate-keeper as he paid the toll, and to one or two wayfarers *en route*, but he took no one up in his carriage, though he generally indulged his benevolence by giving a lift to any pedestrian who might like it. But in case of a pursuit and inquiry, he wished to make it clear to all witnesses that no one had returned home with him that night.

As he drove along the lane leading on to the moor, he met his own servant.

“Where are you going, Nancy?” he said.

“To meeting, sir. The key is under the scraper.”

“Oh! never mind the key. I am going to see the foal on the moor—I suspect he has wandered, and I don’t want him folding. I shall be late home, but you need not sit up.”

The farm-labourers had gone to their homes, but Richard was both able and willing to attend to his own horse. He fed and groomed it, then took the key, indifferent as he had seemed to its whereabouts, entered the house, took out a suit of clothes such as miners wore, and then went for a sack. In it he deposited some bread, cheese, oatmeal, a German sausage, and some candles, all of which he had bought

at Swaleford. Arranging himself in strong grey garments, much stained with the mine-dust and mud, he re-locked the door, replaced the key under the scraper, and with the sack across his shoulder, the clothes upon his arm, and a flask of brandy in his pocket, he proceeded towards the moor, waiting in a shed not far from the hill-top till joined by George Hilary.

“Now put on these things,” he said; “so that if any one does catch a glimpse of you, you may pass for a miner. There are provisions in this sack, and I will bring you more as you need them.”

George obeyed in silence, and then the two men proceeded towards the mine together.

“But won’t the workmen scent me out when they come and go daily?”

“There are no workmen at present. We are stopped for want of capital. Thirty

pounds spent in excavating would assuredly lead to the main vein."

George groaned, but said a moment afterwards,

"Why should I not begin to excavate?"

Iveson smiled; but remembering Samson's advice that he should work, if only to gain sixpence a day, he replied,

"You can try how you stand the work, at any rate."

When they reached the Smelt mill, Iveson opened the disused counting-house, took out lucifer matches, boring-rods, and a pick, and then they entered the mine on foot.

What a noise their footsteps made as they trudged along the tramway, now bringing their iron heels into sharp contact with the rough stones, and now splashing through some inches of water, where the floor was of a lower level. Every noise was repeated and

exaggerated, and repeated again, by the subterranean echoes in a manner strikingly typical of the rules of gossip.

Reaching a kind of chamber about two miles from the entrance, four different levels were seen branching in divergent directions; they entered the first to the right, and after traversing half a mile they came to the end of the tramway. A rough hewn passage led for a short distance further, ending in a deep hole.

“Here the vein has thinned out; but according to the lie of the strata and the direction of the fault, we feel sure that were the level continued some thirty fathoms further, we should come upon the main vein.”

“Then I had better begin to work here?”

“Yes. Let me show you how to use the boring-rods. If you can get two or three driven in before to-morrow night, I will

bring some gunpowder and help you to blast."

Though Iveson had never been called upon to work with his hands in the mine, he had frequently exercised himself with the pick, always wishing to be able to do all that he required of his workmen. He now fixed the boring-iron with well-skilled hand, and the strokes of his mallet were well aimed and vigorous.

When he had completed his first practical lesson in mining, he threw down the implements.

"You can leave them here," he said; "it is twenty to one that any of the men come near the mine at all during this holiday season, and if they did find them, they would be sure they were left there by one of themselves."

Retracing their steps for a hundred feet or

so, George heard a hollow sound as they trod along the floor.

“Here we are at the sump,” he said.

He raised a trap-door of rough but very solid workmanship.

“Are you agile in climbing and scrambling?” he asked.

“I fancy so. Where are we going?”

“Down the sump, which is a rough shaft, descended by means of wooden wedges, which we call ‘stemples,’ driven into the sides of the rock. One can run up and down very fast by using both hands and feet in a cat-like fashion.”

“Will you go first? How shall I carry my lantern?”

“Tie it round your waist.”

So saying, Iveson disappeared down the sump, and George followed at a more leisurely pace. They descended for fifty fathoms, and

came to a kind of chamber ; one part of which was covered by shallow water, but the other was dry.

“Here the water stopped our work, and it was not worth while pumping, as the lead was neither fine nor plentiful. It is in your favour, for it ensures you plenty of fresh water, and I will lower you a rug and a bundle of hay for your bed. There is a hollow here, which will make a capital pantry for you, and I will bring an old shutter to make a door for it. If rats come, you must shoot them with your pistol. When you work, stop to listen at short intervals, the echoes in the main level will ensure you against surprise. At the first alarm take to the sumph, closing the trap-door behind ; there is a pipe down to convey air.”

Iveson glanced around before leaving.

“It is uncommonly like a dungeon,” he said.

“ All the better for that,” exclaimed George ; “ I don’t wish to escape the punishment due to my crime, only to avoid the disgrace which must crush my father and sister. I shall willingly submit to confinement and hard labour for such length of time as fate may direct. I trust in future years to justify the part you have taken in helping me, Mr. Iveson.”

CHAPTER XII.

SOWING TO THE WIND.

Hypocrisy, in mercy spare it !
 That holy robe, O dinna tear it !
 Spare't for their sakes wha aften wear it,
 The lads in black !

BURNS.

As soon as Lord Dungarret discovered the fraud that had been practised on him, his suspicions fell on two persons, Herbert Aylmer and George Hilary ; but on mature consideration he acquitted the former, and bent his entire fury towards George. To gain some light on the subject, if possible, he re-

paired to Herbert's lodging and asked for Mr. Launcelot Rivers.

"He is here, sir, but he is in a raging fever," was the reply.

Now his lordship dreaded fever, knowing well that his college life had not tended to fortify his constitution, so he merely asked if he had any one with him.

"Oh! yes, sir, his papa has come. Will you see him?"

"By all means! Take that card to Mr. Aylmer."

Mr. Aylmer emerged from the inner room, and, begging the guest to be seated, proceeded to deliver a bulletin of his son.

The baron was relieved to hear that it was *brain* fever, as that freed him from the fear of infection; that the patient had become much quieter, and that the doctor hoped he would be able to be removed into Wiltshire in a few

days, Lord Dungarret heard, but did not care to remember.

“Pray, sir, have you seen a young man of the name of Hilary while you have been here?”

“Yes, my lord, I have indeed. A sad young man, I fear, and one who, I have reason to believe, has been the guilty instrument of leading my poor inexperienced boy astray. But I am inclined to hope that even he is not wholly bad, for he was tending Herbert as carefully as any woman could when I arrived.”

“And when was that?”

“On Friday morning.”

“Has he been here since?”

“Yes, he inquired at the door later on Friday, but he has not been here since. I am sorry, for I wanted to lay his sins before him.”

“Do you know where he lodged?”

“ I have no idea.”

“ Nor where he would be likely to go if he left London?”

“ On that subject I am wholly ignorant.”

Lord Dungarret took his leave, and turned his steps towards Scotland Yard, where he secured the aid of a detective to scent out the whereabouts of George Hilary, and arrest him on the charge of forgery.

The doctor's hopeful promise was realized, and Herbert was conveyed in an invalid's carriage to his father's house.

Mrs. Aylmer had fretted herself into a worse state of health than usual, and was unable to take any share in nursing him. Mr. Aylmer was much exhausted with long watching and anxiety, and readily delegated the post of head nurse to Mahala.

The invalid was the worse for his journey, weaker and more delirious, and Mahala sat

beside him more stolid than ever, bathing his brow from time to time, and giving him cooling medicines, but lending her mind to intense listening rather than to watching her patient.

Mr. Aylmer had given such flourishing accounts of his son's progress to cheer his mother, that both she and her maids had expected a very different stage of convalescence, and Mahala had arranged her plans and engagements accordingly. Of late she had slept in a little room downstairs, that she might be able to hear "missis's bell" if it should ring in the night.

And now she puts the glass of medicine to Herbert's lips, and as she does so a faint tapping in the distance makes her start, and the liquid flows over his beard, now grown to respectable dimensions. This rouses him; he pushes her hand away and scolds and frets more or less incoherently. This is torture to her, for she believes that

she hears voices below, but while he is murmuring she cannot hear distinctly. She takes a kerchief to wipe his mouth and dry his beard, and she holds it firmly on his lips for a few seconds, thereby enforcing silence, and arriving at a certainty that persons are speaking below. The invalid resents this liberty and struggles fiercely, yet so feebly that he cannot dislodge Mahala's hand, and she turns an intimidating look upon him which reveals all the cruel cunning of her character, while it brings out forcibly all the repulsive ugliness of her countenance. Herbert quails and ceases his resistance, and Mahala listens in peace.

It is Crompton's voice, that she is not surprised at—he has come to the window as she expected, but what is Mercy doing there? What put it into Mercy's head to leave her garret, and sleep on the ground-floor? What call has Mercy to sleep lightly, and hear sig-

nals not intended for her ear?—and beyond that, what call has she to keep up a long conversation at dead of night with another girl's lover? She would have given half her savings if Herbert would have dropped asleep, but she had effectually scared sleep from him for that night.

The voices ceased at last. Silence again reigned as solemn queen of the night ; but the sufferer continued restless, and shuddered whenever Mahala approached him.

He was unrefreshed in the morning, and full of complaints. All day he continued repeating that Mahala was bad, very bad, and she should never nurse him again. His parents ascribed this to the feverish nightmare of sickness ; and while they humoured him by promises that Mercy should be nurse instead of Mahala, they attached no suspicion at all to the rejected handmaiden.

For long he continued so ill that it was out of the question to agitate him by distressing questions; so his father took other means of ascertaining his debts, sold out of the funds, and paid them; and when on his convalescence he assented warmly to general acknowledgments of the depravity of human nature, the deceitfulness of the heart, and man's need of divine help, his mother rejoiced over his affecting repentance, and resolved to hide his fault from every eye.

For this reason she determined not to recall either of her daughters; and Mr. Aylmer was of the same mind, not wishing to cloud or shorten their holiday. So they were told nothing either of their brother's illness or his misconduct. Mercy was nurse to Herbert, and housemaid in general; and Mahala was nurse to missis, and housekeeper-cook.

But convalescence came to Herbert long before the nerves of his mother overcame the shock they had received. Her spine was weaker than ever, and she could only bear to be removed from her bed to the sofa for a few hours, and her one chance of sleep was by Mahala's faultless adjustment of the water cushion for her back.

Summer was far advanced when Mahala presented herself unsummoned beside her mistress's couch. Her face was more gloomy than usual, and wore an injured expression, as she said,

"Please, ma'am, can I have a few days' holiday?"

"A few days, Mahala! Why, what am I to do in the meanwhile? How can you be so unreasonable!"

Mahala's countenance assumed a purple hue.

“ I’ve been here ten years, and I’ve never had a holiday worth calling one. Other servants get them reg’lar every year. I be worn out, and I must have a change. I would rather give up my place than go on like this !”

“ Where do you want to go ?” asked Mrs. Aylmer in a cold reproachful tone.

“ I do want to go to Weston. There be a cheap trip from Saturday to Monday. I shall go with Martin the carrier to the station, and I’ve got an aunt at Weston that I can stop with.”

“ Well, you must go if you are so set upon it ; but if you are ill and needing change, I wonder you’ve not mentioned it.”

“ You did have enough to think of without doctoring I. Mother told me to take a teaspoonful of ink in half a cup of beer every night, and I did it ; but I can’t say I do feel much better. I want sea air.”

She walked out of the room with the same injured air, and repaired to her own chamber. The clouds looked threatening, a gusty wind was rising, but Mahala heeded not the weather. She donned a lavender silk dress which her mistress had given her on condition of it being dyed black, added a green barége shawl, and a straw bonnet trimmed with blue, and parasol in hand she hurried forth.

She took the field-path leading on to the Downs, and proceeded across them towards Trowbury. The wind blew cold, and in loud gusts, and ere she had proceeded far, a storm of rain came in the gale, but Mahala would not return. She rounded the hill, breasting the wind with a determination which would have done credit to a better cause, and reached the station in a sad plight, as concerned her dress, but in good time for the train. Then she took out a ticket for Bristol,

and had the delight, on arriving at the station there, to be met by young Crompton.

"Then you did get leave, after all!" he exclaimed, admiringly.

"I did insist upon it!" she said, with dignity, and the purple colour rose in her cheek, and her eyes rolled and blinked, and any unprejudiced beholder would have pronounced her ten times more ugly and repulsive than she had ever looked before.

But Crompton seemed charmed both with her spirit and her appearance.

"You have done right," he said, "to stand up for yourself. Now you'll see the sea, and you'll see Wales, and be ever so much better for it," and he glanced tenderly at her.

Again the purple rose, and she bustled away with short waddling steps to gain the boat.

The saying that "true love never runs

smooth " is almost too hackneyed to be quoted, but Mahala experienced the truth of it on this occasion. She had certainly never seen the sea before, but neither had she ever *felt* seasickness, and the pain of the one experience far more than counterbalanced the delight of the other. On the other hand, she was a gainer by her illness, for she was too sick to be alarmed by the tossing of the vessel. Had conscience been free to make itself heard, her passage had indeed been a suffering one ; but Mahala's conscience was enslaved by her will, and she flung truth, honour, and honesty to one side to gain the attention and indulgence she felt to be her due. All that Sunday she flaunted about at Milford Haven, leaning on Crompton's arm, while he wore gold studs, the lawful property of Herbert, anent which the poor hard-working laundress was still under suspicion, as it was supposed they had

been sent to the wash in the shirt with which they had been last worn.

It was the middle of Monday before they reached Bristol again, and made their way to Crompton's lodging. There he showed Mahala with pride that his parlour was as smart as need be, and Mahala looked pleased and conscious to recognize many a china cup and vase, and other ornament, which she had pretended to have found broken, and chuckled that her credulous mistress never cared to see the pieces.

“I be a deal better here than at Chalkley, and I be making a vast of money. Still there's no denying that a little more will be very desirable, and if you do go on in place for another term or two, there's no fear but you'll get more.”

“That I shall!” replied Mahala. “I'll have my wages raised this next term, and I'll

get you some more ornymments. You've got nothing ormlore, I must be looking for something."

Alas for the rain and wind ! How it beat on the weary woman trudging along the Chalkley road that Monday evening. How the white mud bespattered the fine gown and shawl ; how it clung to her feet, making every step more fatiguing than the last ! She was almost fainting as she lifted the latch of the kitchen door at the Rectory, and as she sunk down in a chair, she burst into tears.

Mercy was amazed to see her stern sister thus. She fetched dry clothes, took off the mud-laden boots and stockings, and, with womanly consideration, brought a tub of warm water for the aching feet. Then she ran up to her mistress, and said that Mahala was ill and weary, procured for her some wine and spice, wherewith to concoct some reviving negus.

Mrs. Aylmer could not cherish displeasure, and deeply as she had been offended by Mahala's selfishness, she was yet as eager as possible to comfort and aid her now. She desired Mercy to put her to bed immediately, and give her the wine and water ; and Mahala was thankful enough to submit to the motherly commands. But the kindness had no softening influence, her nature was too essentially hard.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FATHER'S COUNSEL.

For females usually don't want
A fellow-gossip that will cant ;
Who still is pleased with other's ails,
And therefore carries spiteful tales.

KING.

THE two sisters are seated in the kitchen, waiting till the bell shall sound for the removal of the supper-tray. Mercy pretends to be busy mending her mistress's stockings, but she is silently weeping. Mahala sits at another table, her head leaned on her hand, and her countenance wearing an angry expression.

“I don’t know what thee’ll come to nex,” she grumbled. “Thee have never before dared to ask about my business, and I bean’t goin’ to begin to tell thee my affairs. Mr. Herbert have been making a worse saint of thee than him were before him did drink and borrow, and do such like things as would have sent a poor man to Botany Bay.”

Mercy’s fair cheek flushed.

“You be telling lies, Mahla, I know you be. Mr. Herbert did lend money to a friend in trouble, and that was how him did get wrong.”

“Oh! was it! I believe you. Missis did tell I a different story when her was deleerious, that her did. But it be no use for I to talk. Mr. Herbert have told thee his own story, and he was always used to tell it pretty.”

“Well, Mahla, you can’t but say that him be as good as an angel now. Listen to his

singing, it be surely enough to tempt the angels out of heaven !”

Mahala sneered ; but the ringing of the dining-room bell stopped her reply, and Mercy hastened to obey its summons, placing everything on the tray with cautious gentleness, not to lose a note of the exquisite strain which the prodigal was singing. It was part of an anthem, and the music was exquisitely suited to the words. “Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.” Mercy set the loaded tray on the hall table, and sat down on the stairs to listen to the end, plentiful tears raining down her face as the music penetrated her soul.

The song ceased, and Mercy dried her eyes, and was preparing to resume her tray, when Herbert darted from the room, about to ascend the stairs at a few bounds on some

sudden errand. On perceiving Mercy, he closed the door behind him, and, advancing, laid his hand on her head.

“What ails you, my child?” he said in a tone of tenderness.

“Oh, nothing, sir!—nothing at all sir! It were only the music made me think of heaven, sir.”

“Yes, Mercy, it will be wonderfully sweet there, won't it? No one will speak evil of us there, nor blame us! It will be all harps, and music, and everlasting praise!”

He looked as angelic as his music had sounded, now that he stood with upraised eyes, his slender hand on the girl's fair head, his whole expression one of exalted spirituality. Mercy was awed, and when, after a whispered “God bless you, my child!” he bounded upstairs, she watched him with wondering and admiring eyes.

She had scarcely begun to wash the supper things, when the outer door opened cautiously. Mahala started up with an empurpled face, but sat down again, saying coldly,

“ Oh ! it's you, father. You did frighten I ! ”

“ I be come to talk serious to 'ee, my maids,” said Broad, gloomily. “ Come hither, Mercy, and leave the chiny for afterwards. Mother and brothers and me be going to the other world, maidens.”

Mercy turned very pale, and clasped her arms round her father's neck.

“ Are you sure, father ? ” she asked ; “ have a angel called you ? ”

“ Thee be the only angel as us do know on,” he replied gently, placing her by his side. “ It bean't dying that I do mean, but goin' to forrin parts ; emigrating, they call it.”

“ Oh ! father, what shall we do without you ! Oh ! don't go ! ”

Her father watched her closely as he said,

“ If folks do tell true, thee have got somebody else to take care of thee, only him has little thought o' doin' it, him have got other and better fish to fry.”

Mercy turned crimson, then ashy pale, then she said,

“ I be fair muddled, and don't know what you mean, father.”

“ I'll tell 'ee, then. Folks do say as how young Crompton be a-courting o' one o' my maids, and they do say that he means no good to she. Now says I to mother, ‘ It'll be Mercy's bonny face that he be a looking after, and if him counts to wrong her, him had better say his prayers first, for him ant got long to live ! ’ But, Mercy, my maid, thee shall go to forrin parts with we, and thee shall

have ever such a fine husband—thee can pick and choose out there.”

Mercy laughed hysterically.

“Don’t talk so, father ; it would break my heart to leave master and missis and the young ladies. And, indeed, it’s all a lie about Crompton—him have never said a word to I, except one night just after Master Herbert had comed home.”

Mahala shot an evil glance at her blooming sister, then said solemnly,

“I do wonder at you, father, at your age, to hearken to every ‘he say’ and ‘she say.’ You had ought to have trusted I to look after the maid—you don’t surely think I would let her go with this lad and that lad, and not correct her?”

“Well, Mahla, thee’s maybe right. I’ll not deny that thee be a real steady maid, and one to be trusted. Us have never thought

o' queshuning thee about sweethearts ; but then thee's not in much temptation. Mother and me ud ha liked to have carried ye both with us, but ye've got good places, and us won't force ye away. Masters have been hard and cruel to me, and us do leave nothing but a curse behind us ; only if our maids have been better treated, they had ought to have better feelings. But, mind me, Mahla and Mercy, I'll not have you encourage that Crompton—him be a drunken, proud, sneering rascal, hand-in-glove with the man what have ruined we, and he shan't keep company with my bonny maid. Remember, I forbid it !”

Mercy glanced timidly at Mahala.

“Folks keep bad tongues, father,” she said. “Maybe Crompton's not as bad as they say. Don't believe all they tell you.”

“Well, my blessing, I won't. You give me

your word not to keep company with him, and I'll think no more about him."

"I promise, father," she said; but an appealing look at her sister added, "Do not deceive him. It is for you to confess, not for me to betray; don't let him go away believing a lie."

But Mahala uttered no word, and Broad, quite relieved from his anxiety, ran on chatting.

"What lies folks do tell, to be sure! There was Iddo Long, him comed in before he went off to the ship, and him did say that Mercy have been off to Bristol to see Crompton, and had been seen in the streets hanging on his arm, and that all the town was talking of the maid's lightness. And all a lie—all a string o' lies. This country got a bad mouth, my maids, it is time her teeth were thinned. But it's getting late, and Mercy haven't washed

her supper things. Good night, my maids, us do sail in a fortnight, and if ee can spare a cast gown or a pair o' shoes for mother her'll be glad on it."

He shut the door, and the sound of his footsteps quickly died away. Then Mercy turned to her sister with a new courage in her meek eyes. "Mahla," she said, "father have heard the very same story that I did hear; if master do hear it too it'll set him thinking and you'll be forced to tell him whether you went to Weston or not. If him speak to father, father'll go straight to aunt and ask her."

Mahala stood at bay.

"Thee had better tell master, and father, and everybody. Thee's the maid to tell on another, for thee doeen't know that folks could see through a keyhole when a humble servant was a-nursing of a sick gentleman. Thee can

afford to prim at a bit o' courting with a butcher, when thee's bin kissed and cuddled by a real gentleman day by day and night by night."

Mercy was deathly pale now, but a light shone in her eye, which made even Mahala quail. She spoke in a low clear voice, but with great firmness.

"It's false, false, Mahla! Mr. Herbert has behaved like a true gentleman, as he is, at all times, and in all places. He has been kind, very kind," here her voice faltered; "he has taught me, and told me about heaven, and such things, and he has said handsome things about my attendance—but he has never kissed me, never touched me or looked at me but as he might have done with mistress by. Go on at me as you please, Mahla, but backbite him again and I'll go straight to master, and tell him all I know."

“And you question me again, and meddle in my business, and I promise you I’ll say that to father as’ll make him take you emigratin’ with him. Now go to bed, for I’ve had enough of this.”

Mercy placed the crockery in the press, and taking her candle crept cautiously up stairs. Mahala listened to her retreating footsteps, then threw a shawl over her head, and taking a bottle in her hand was preparing to glide out into the darkness, but she heard voices, so changed her mind and locked the door. Then she stole up stairs, listened at the door and heard that her master and mistress were in their bed-room; she took a key from her pocket and entering the dining-room, applied it to the sideboard cupboard. Thence she took a large key and proceeded down a dark narrow staircase to the cellar. Here she selected a bottle, placed an empty

one in its stead, and returned to the kitchen. She sat long by the fire, sipping from a cup, then with a dreamy look she poured hot water in the cup and threw the dregs behind the fire, hid the bottle, and retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COLONEL DECLINES "CARPETUS."

There envy, sorry fiend, that aye doth dog
The path of all that are or good or great,
Was borne along, a prosperous demagogue.

CALVERT.

It is August, and the brown moors are donning their robes of imperial purple. Botcherdale is in a state of considerable excitement, for wains are moving along the winding road, bringing the baggage of the shooters. Richard Iveson is busy carrying his few pet treasures to the Thorny Hall stables, and his servant is accommodating the belongings of the new

people in his house. Smith stands at his own door, telescope in hand, and watches Iveson along the hill path, the wains moving down in the valley, and his own youngest child, who is climbing the rocky wood near Thorny Hall, with a letter in her hand. She disappears within the gates, tarries awhile, and then returns, and her impatient father goes forth to meet her.

“Well, where’s the answer?” he says.

“The gentleman will send an answer, or the lady will come and see you,” was the reply.

And Smith grunted discontentedly.

In the meanwhile, the letter has reached the colonel’s hands, and he makes persevering attempts at perusing it, as he and Elsie sit over their dinner. Elsie rises to supply her father with potatoes ; for Barbara, now their only servant, does not even profess to wait at table.

When she has set down the dish, she returns to her father, offering the aid of her keener sight to decipher the crooked and confused characters over which he is puzzling. Yielding to her wishes, and proceeding with his dinner, he listened calmly as his daughter read the following sentences :

“ Mr. Smith of Raven nest presents his compliments to cornel hilry, you have bin over the sees, and you have fort battels, and you have seed a deal o’ folk, but what I want to know of you is if you’ve seed aught disagreeabler or more good for nothing than a upstart undutiful son—that’s what I want to know of cornel hilry. Your gamekeeper just wants you to speak, sir, and you’ll hear a thing or two as you’ll reckon curiosities. I know a man as had too sons t’oldest didn’t get wed t’youngest and good-for-nowtest did, t’ane died t’other lived on for nowt but to

disgrace his parents and hissell, that's my son Nathan he tuk a farm, he did, and he reckoned to work it after new fashuns, and he'd teach his father, aye and his grandfather, if nobbut he hadn't got out o' his clatter, he'd learn anybody, and all the time he know'd nowt hissell, him as died had t'brass and t'things, and he left in his will that Nat's bairn suld have his watch and dangles, and Nat's sell his brass, milord gets that fast enough, and works farm curiouser nor ever, and now says he, 'father, I'm for t'dangles.' 'Oh, you want t'dangles and t'watch,' says I, 'do you, my fine gentleman! then I'll tell ye what, Mr. Want is boon to be yer master.' And if he didn't argify and threap me down as he had a right to t'things for t'bairn's sake, but I tuk no heed, I just sed 'when t'bairns o' age he can come here and he'll find t'watch and dangles that his

uncle left him. I know a person,' says I, 'who, maybe, thinks hersell half a lady, though it's very different from what other folks thinks on her, and she would like to wear that chain and dangles about her arm of Sundays, for a bracelet like, but if she gets them from Joseph Smith for that purpose she's cunninger than I reckon for,' so milord gets into a flustering rage, and he says he'll tak' t'law on me, and says I, 'wait a bit, t'brass has to come to you, more's the pity, but your pocket won't be deep enough to afford law while I'm above ground; it's awkward that you have to wait for the shoes till I put them off, and I make no doubt that you find me in the way, but not a penny will you get from me till t'law gies it ye, and then it 'll be too late to set t'lawyers on me.' Then he was in a way, and didn't he rage, and curse, and call me everything! and this is cornel hilry's

tenant of Beechwood ; what I say is, give him the sack, make him budge, he'll not easy get another farm with such a crakter as I'll gie him. Smith calls on cornel hilry to do justice, to put down undutifulness, and to teach young folks to behave theirselves. If you believe me, show your respect for me by punishing this upstart, if you don't then there's but one thing for you,

CARPETUS."

"Carpetus, carpetus, what can that mean?" said Colonel Hilary, laughing, as he took the ill-written letter from his daughter's hand to scrutinize the word written in large text at the end.

"It looks like Latin ; there is a word not unlike it in the grammar I used so to abhor ; I could fancy I had learnt it. Carpetus, carpiti, carpito—isn't that it, papa?"

“If carpetus were a word, you might so decline it; but it is not a word, to my knowledge, so my only way of declining will be to refuse taking any notice of it. How strange that Smith should not know that Beechwood has gone out of my hands! I will write him a line to that effect—it will be a good reason for my not interfering in his family squabble; if I did so at all, it would be to claim the watch for Nathan, as the rightful trustee for his child.”

“Won’t you speak to Mr. Iveson first, papa? I want you to go with me to finish my sunset picture of his house before the sportsmen come, and you can tell him about Smith while I paint. It seems so strange that the man should not know that we have sold Beechwood, that I think Mr. Iveson must have purposely concealed the fact.”

“Possibly. We can’t guess what little

jealousies exist among these dalesmen. At any rate, I should be sorry to let any cat out of the bag which Iveson wished to keep hidden, so I will go and talk it over with him."

Richard Iveson joined them as they proceeded along the moor, and, taking the wallet from Elsie, he turned to the colonel.

"May I offer you an arm, sir; you can lean much more heavily on me than on Miss Hilary?"

"No, Iveson, thank you. I am so much stronger now, that I only lean on my daughter's shoulder from habit and affection; I really require no support. I was coming to seek you, to shew you a wonderful document that I have received from Smith."

He gave the letter to his agent, who ran his eye over it rapidly; but when he came to the request about Beechwood, his amused air

changed to one of vexation, and he asked anxiously as he returned the letter :

“Have you entered into any explanation with him?”

“No ; I was going to write him that I had no further interest in the farm, but Elsie suggested that you might have some reason for concealing its sale from him.”

“I am grateful to you for waiting to speak to me of this. I have reasons strong enough, though too intricately mixed up with the politics of the dale to make it worth your while to go into their details, which render me very anxious not to explain the ownership of Beechwood for another year at least. Nathan is a surly fellow ; he has the family temper, and is often much to blame in his squabbles with his father, but he is doing well to the land, he is in my power, and I make him farm after my fashions—fashions contemptible

enough in his father's eyes, no doubt. You will confer a great favour on me, colonel, if you will leave this matter in my hands, simply referring to me as your agent."

"I will do so, Iveson. In fact, it is a great relief to me to get the matter out of my hands. I would gladly get rid of Smith, but, I suppose, if I dismissed him from my service as gamekeeper, he would only become my enemy instead, and harass me in every way in his power."

"That is exactly what he would do."

"And what, in the name of wonder, is the English of 'carpetus'?"

Iveson laughed heartily.

"Don't you know," he said, "the term employed by servants for a master's or mistress's scolding? It is derived from the fact that such lectures generally takes place, in a carpeted room. Joseph Smith here begs that,

if you doubt his account of matters, you will have him and his son face to face in your own dining-room ; and all this is expressed in one phrase—‘ Carpet us’.”

“ It is all clear enough now that you explain it, but it puzzled me entirely at first. Elsie, my dear, don’t forget to write a line to Smith, and say I refer him for all such business to Mr. Iveson.”

“ Yes, papa. Now, shall we go home ? As you are to go to church for the first time to-morrow, I am very anxious you should not be over-fatigued to-night ; and perhaps you may be able to go and see the shooting on the twelfth.”

“ I quite hope so, love. We will take luncheon to the crag behind Beechwood, and as the purchaser has given our friend Iveson the shooting there, we will entertain him when his toil is over.”

The old man and his daughter returned home, and Iveson continued his preparations for removal. He had not left the premises ere the shooting party arrived at the gate.

CHAPTER XV .

SHOOTER'S SUNDAY.

Ah, simply open wide the temple door,
 And let the solemn swelling organ greet
 With voluntaries meet
 The willing advent of the rich and poor !
 And while to God the loud hosannahs soar,
 With rich vibrations from the vocal throng—
 From quiet shades that to the woods belong,
 And brooks with music of their own,
 Voices may come to swell the choral song
 With notes of praise they learned in musings lone.
HOOD.

“ IT’LL be a great disappointment to t’ parson
 if we don’t go to t’ church on Shooter’s Sun-
 day,” whined Hannah Smith as she fried the
 eggs and bacon for her husband’s breakfast.

“All t’ dale will be there to-day, and t’ meeting ’ll be empty ; don’t ye think we suld go just for this once, father ?”

Hannah had been successful with her poultry, and had just been enabled by them to purchase a new silk gown, and her vanity pleaded strongly for leave to exhibit her finery on this day of days.

But her husband had no such weakness ; the strongest quality in his nature was revenge, and he was unmoved by his wife’s insinuations, to which he replied slowly,

“The more disappointinger it is, the sweeter it tastes to me, mother. I hope t’parson will feel shamed of hissell when he sees a upstart like Nathan instead of respectable people of property like us. This is the first time I’ve been away from church on Shooter’s Sunday ; and I reckon I shall be the only man in t’dale as ’ll stop away ; but I’ll do that and more when

I've said I will. Old Iveson never went to church, Kissamus or any time but Shooter's Sunday; but Richard goes every Sunday, making it quite common. He had better look out, Richard had, he's high hand getting into hotter water than he'll be well able to bide."

Hannah sighed, and proceeded to wash the cups. Then she dressed herself in her green silk gown, and cap with pink ribbons, and came and sat with her husband on the bench outside the house, "For," she argued mentally, "if we see through a telescope, others may; and who can tell but the fine folks and the dalesmen may spy us, as we are doing them, and so see my new gown."

Joseph fixed the glass, and presently began what was rather meant as a soliloquy than as an address to his wife.

"Here they come! Them's our folks!

Waggonette they call that trap, and two real tidy hosses. One, two, three gentlemen, and two ladies. They look t' right sort, them does, t' gentlemen walking up t' hill as fast as t' hosses ; I like that, now—' a good man's merciful to his beast,' says Solomon, and I'm o' t' same mind. Solomon, you and me wouldn't fall out. Eh ! but what's this ? Dick Iveson's trap, I do declare ! and t' cornel and his dowter in it. Dick's walking up t' hill too, and t' cornel makes as if he were driving ; but that's sham, Iveson's horse an't to be druv with one old hand. I see how 'tis, Iveson walks down t' hill nighhand t' hosses heed, as well as up t' hill, and t' beast follows him, so t' cornel has nobbut to make believe t' hodd t' reins. Dick's playing a tidy game there, I'll apod. He's bought Beechwood with t' brass his father left him ; he's let his house, and he works like a slave,

doing odd jobs about t' hall, as well as reglar work—he's saving fast, Dick is! My stars, there's t' Grimsby folks in a ornamental buss and four horses, and gay ladies and fine gentlemen ever so many—look through t' glass, Hannah, one can fair see 'em talking and grining ane at t'ither—them's a wild lot, I'll apod. Them won't do for Joseph Smith. I wonder what they'll do for t' hosses, White's stable 'll be full already. Iveson can put his up at Farmer Pedley's, but them four prancers 'll be sadly in t' way. There's a deal o' folk on t' road; them'll be t' Meccas fra' Summer Lodge; and there's t' Lowthers coming down t' Grimsby hill; and t' Aldersons crossing t' river—the church 'll be fullish. If they ventur to put anybody in our seats, I won't pay my tithe. I say, Hannah, who's that o' horseback—that's a novelty?"

Hannah applied her eye to the glass, but

failed to discern any name written upon the stranger, so she could only reply with a guess,

“It'll be one of the folks from London.”

And now the people throng into the usually neglected church. Iveson precedes the Colonel and his daughter to a large square pew in one corner, sees that the books and cushions are all that is required, shuts them in, and takes his usual place; but he is churchwarden, and Shooter's Sunday is not a holiday to Church officers. A large party enters, the sojourners in his own house, and for these he has prepared a place, to which he at once leads them; this is not their first shooting season, and the costume of the ladies is in the same style as that adopted by Alice Hilary, neat and seemly, but so quiet as to attract no attention. The clergyman enters and ascends the reading-desk. He has pronounced the first verse of the opening Scriptures, when the omnibus

travellers come in, and his voice is drowned in the rustle of silk and the tapping of high-heeled boots. Even Alice Hilary lifts her eyes off her prayer-book, and the Colonel looks over his spectacles, while the rest of the congregation turn not only their heads but their whole persons towards the strangers, as if attracted to a new pole.

The ladies wear hats so small as only to cover the extreme summit of the head, over these wave feathers of every hue, or they are garnished with gay birds and abundant flowers. The dresses are of light silk or gay muslin, and expand in endless crinoline and trains. One lady fills a seat generally occupied by four, and space is wanting to accommodate the whole party. The congregation watch poor Iveson's frantic efforts at settling the new comers, and are wholly oblivious that the clergyman, along with the old officer and

his companion, are engaged in the general confession.

At last order is restored. Richard Iveson returns to his post, and the worshippers suddenly realise that they are standing when they should be kneeling, and drop down to hear the last clauses in the Absolution; then a stranger enters softly, seats himself near the desk, and joins unobserved in the service.

Peace and quiet reign undisturbed in the church until the end of the Litany, when the choir and all interested in the music become somewhat agitated, for the leader has been taken ill. Nathan Smith has accepted the nervous position of choir-master on this important occasion. Happily for him, Farmer Pedley's brother is there, but Nathan only ascertains this when the congregation face round to the gallery, according to the time-honoured custom, and he sees with dismay

that he has no hymn-book. The verse is given out from the desk, Nathan is about to raise the tune, when his eye catches that of the well-known musician ; he makes a motion of the lips, which silently utter “Kep,” and lifting a spare hymn-book in the air, he shies it over the heads of the people straight into the uplifted hand of Isaac Pedley. The dalesfolk see this unmoved, fully appreciating the motive, but the strangers are a good deal upset, and the flowers and feathers quiver during the remainder of the service at every memory of it. The sermon is all about truth, justice, and charity ; it is short, plain, and universally applicable. Somehow the worshippers grew less satisfied with themselves as the preacher depicted what Christians ought to be ; and when he told them how to gain help, and showed them how well worth the trouble of attainment the purer robes were, many began

to desire the higher life, and in the eyes of some there burned a holy resolution to aspire and strive for some likeness to the image of God. The sermon concluded, the blessing given, and the people thronged out into the sunny valley, and all was bustle and noise again.

Joseph and his wife were at their post again, to watch the "loosing of the congregation."

A road across the moors led past their house, and they were surprised to see the stranger traversing it on foot, still more so when he addressed Joseph.

"Is this the Raven's Nest?"

"You've about hit it, sir."

"Then you are Mr. Smith, keeper to these moors?"

"There you are again, another dead shot."

"Mr. Smith, I am a stranger from London.

I don't aspire to the honour of carrying a gun, but I want to get the moor air, and to see a little sport. If you can let me lodge for a few days with you, and accompany you on to the moor, I will pay you well."

Joseph scratched his head.

"Lodge you can, sir ; but as for the moor, you see, them folk is my masters. I could only take you if you would make yersell useful, and do a decent day's work. You see we're all for work, we shooters, and we don't never encourage idle hangers-on."

"I'll work with a good will. It's health I'm seeking, and it will do my health more good to work than to be idle. Call me your brother from Australia if you like."

"Nay, I haven't got one. But I've a cousin, that'll cap you. Come in, cousin ; Hannah, where are ye ? This is our cousin from Americay."

Joseph fell into the plan with seeming simplicity, but as he scanned the stranger his secret thoughts said,

“Health is a convenient excuse ; you’ve got too much of it to give money and time and labour for more ; you’ve another motive, and it will be a great amusement to Joseph Smith to find it out. If you cheat Joseph, you’ve only another to cheat, my fine fellow.”

The stranger, who gave his name as Mr. Edmund Gray, evinced at once a keen power of observation, and a lively interest in the politics of Botcherdale. He eagerly questioned his new cousin as to the various members of that morning’s congregation ; learned with apparent surprise that all “the quality” were strangers, except the old gentleman and the young lady who sat in the family pew.

“Indeed,” rejoined the American; “and what do they call themselves?”

“Cornel and Miss Hilry. They live in yon old house, and keep as quiet as mice. She’s a decent lass, Miss Alice is, but he’s as proud as pride can make him.”

The interest in Mr. Edmund Gray’s countenance was no longer feigned, and Joseph Smith noted the fact.

“Do they see much company, this Colonel and Miss Mildred?”

“Company say ye! Nay, forsooth, they keep no company. They’ve been here sin March, as no one but the doctors has come nigh hand ’em.”

“You surprise me! Do no relatives come? The young lady is very handsome—has she no suitors?”

“Never a sweetheart as I knows on—and it is curious. But I reckon she’s no great

fortin, and folks in these parts think a deal o' that; beauty, you see, is only skin deep."

"Just so, sir. Then the father and daughter live over there with no companions but servants?"

Smith chuckled.

"Servants say ye?" he replied. "And how many o' them do they keep, think ye?"

Gray calculated the size of the hall, and opined that it might be kept in good order by four women servants and two men.

Smith laughed cynically.

"How near you do guess!" he said; "but you've rayther overshot t'mark. Try again."

"Three women and one man."

"That's better, but there's nowt but women."

It was in vain that Gray questioned him further, his cousin had ascertained to his own satisfaction that he was very eager to make

himself master of every particular concerning Colonel Hilary. "If you think to pump Joseph Smith, my fine fellow, you're reckoning without your host," he soliloquized. "The Cornel's no friend o' mine, rather the contrary, and I've no sort of objection to help you to map out all his ways, but you must go another way to work first. Joseph Smith must both be paid and trusted if you're to get owt out o' him."

Finding that he could get no more information about the servants, he tried the doctors, but Smith was no more candid in his replies concerning them. "Doctor Thompson attended reglar," he said, "and another doctor or two had come from London, or Manchester, or Glasgow, he could not remember which; he was sorry," he said, "for if he had come from London, Mr. Gray might have known him, and then he could hear from him all the

particulars he was so anxious to know, and which he, Joseph Smith, could not inform him upon, as he made it a principle *not* to meddle with his neighbour's business." Having thus shut up his new relative, he proposed to him to further the *real* object of his excursion into Yorkshire by going out to breathe the moor air, and, pretending only to examine the beat for to-morrow, he gave Mr. Edmund Gray such a breathing that he was glad to crawl off to his bed, and postpone all furtherance of his real or pretended object till the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWELFTH OF AUGUST.

The shades of eve come slowly down,
The woods are wrapt in deeper brown,
The owl awakens from her dell,
The fox is heard upon the fell;
Enough remains of glimmering light
To guide the wanderer's steps aright,
Yet not enough from far to show
His figure to the watchful foe."

Lady of the Lake.

THE orb of day rose gloriously on the purple moors, and poured such heat upon the heather, that the doomed birds hid themselves in the shadiest places, lying close among the tall ling. Alas, their hiding availed them not,

steps approached their covert, bright eyes suddenly peered into their retreat, and, as they started and flew upward, scared by the intrusion, a loud report checked their cries of terror, and one of their number fell bleeding to the earth.

Alice was startled from her sleep in the early morning by a shot on the adjacent moor; she was glad of the early *reveille*, for to-day she was to make her first attempt toward returning some of her good friend's kindness. She hastened to the kitchen, and while old Barbara pursued her daily avocations, she prepared pastry and baked meat pies; then, taking her hat, she went to the adjacent wood and gathered wild raspberries in abundance; these she mixed with a few currants bought from the village, and, adding cream and sugar, filled wide-necked bottles with the composition. "How hot it is!" she thought,

as she packed the pannier, "I will take a lemon and some sugar, and our last bottle of sherry; there is a clear spring on the moor, which will supply the other ingredient wanting for lemonade—a fresh roll, salt, and butter, and my preparations are complete."

As the hour of noon approached she began to realize the difficulties of her undertaking. Barbara could not saddle the pony, and she herself could not do it—her father's one hand was certainly not adequate to the task—what was to be done? The colonel suggested that she should lend him her hands, and he would be groom. This agreed upon, they went to the stable together, and lo, the pony stood ready-saddled.

"How thoughtful that fellow is!" exclaimed he; "he never forgets our comfort! I hope you have got a nice luncheon for him?"

"Yes, I think it is nice," Alice replied, and the two started on their mission together.

A burning sun, the air quivering as if peopled with millions of iridescent mites, the heath-bloom giving forth its fullest scent, and the very earth glowing with heat; guns popping far and near, giving a sense of excitement to every listener; birds flying with wild cries from assailants hidden behind the neighbouring hill; white specks bounding in the distance; a patient old pony coming along, bearing a load of game, and accompanied by a keeper or his assistant and a worn-out dog; and Alice and her father felt the spirit of the day enter into them, and imagined themselves every whit sportsmen.

The man touched his hat as he passed Alice, and asked respectfully the way to the Raven's Nest. Alice showed it to him.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said, re-

turning after a few steps, "but my orders is to bring back the pony and a fresh dog to Ashpot Scar, and I am not sure exactly where it is."

"Do you see that grey rock on the hill-side, opposite a house surrounded by wood?"

"Yes, miss, I see it."

"That is Ashpot Scar; this road will lead you back to it, if you keep to the left."

He thanked her, and proceeded on his way; and she felt her gladness overshadowed, there was something in the man's squinting eye and his keen expression which chilled her, and gave her a foreboding of coming evil. She had planned to leave her father to rest in the shade, and to wander herself to the mine and get a peep at George, but the instinctive terror roused by Gray's scrutiny decided her at once to abandon her intention.

They pass the shady beech-trees which give

the name to the farm, and come upon a new enclosure, recently fenced off. Near this a fresh spring bubbled from the rock, which was a miniature of the Ashpot Scar opposite ; but the Ashpot spring was dry, and the pool beneath the rock, called by the miners Ashpot Hole, was dry also.

Near the spring Alice spread her cloth of snowy damask, securing it from the vagaries of the breeze by grey stones, the *débris* of the parent rock ; she made these also secure small bouquets of ling, which gave a new and charming aspect to the rough weights, and she dressed her dishes with fresh ferns and blue-bells, till the contents of the panniers looked like a grand luncheon furnished in Gunter's best style.

At the appointed hour Iveson appeared toiling up the bank ; he looked very weary, for he carried his own bag, in his usual self-

reliant way. His eyes sparkled as he looked at Elsie's feast, but his manner was as constrained as it had been in the earliest days of their acquaintanceship.

Elsie was pained at this, and resolved to thaw his reserve, if it were possible. She mixed lemonade, and met him with a glass of it, which she offered to his lips. How welcome was the draught!

She made him sit down by her father.

"You are to be quite quiet, Mr. Iveson. You know it is a rule of the twelfth that the ladies wait on the gentlemen—you and papa have nothing to do but to sit still and obey me."

She was so gentle in her assumed imperiousness that it made her only the more winning; she supplied the refreshment, renewed the supply unasked, refilled the glasses again and again, and even carried the plates

to wash them at the spring; but this was too much, and Iveson sprang up to aid her.

She folded her arms and drew herself up.

“Mr. Iveson, I am offended. Return to your place, if you do not wish to be banished from my feast. No, I do not allow you to approach the spring. Resume your seat.”

Meekly, like a humble loving child (a very scarce animal, by-the-bye), the strong man obeyed, and then received as reward fruit and cream and a jug of fresh water and cool sherry.

Elsie was very happy. Her father and the agent reposed under the shelter of the rock; the former soon slept, and the latter was well disposed to follow his example. Elsie stole away to seek plants under the beech-trees; she had wandered pretty far when her eye fell upon a mole track near some rocks, and

as the sun poured his rays upon the heaps freshly thrown up by the small excavator, she saw grains of silver glittering among the earth. At first it was only her eye that saw it, for she was thinking of George. Her pictures, three in number, were to start for Edinburgh that evening, along with the contents of Iveson's game-bag, and she was wondering how much money she should thus gain towards poor George's debt. Iveson had not thought it wise to explain to her how George was working in his imprisonment. She looked at the shining grains mechanically, and then as mechanically stooped and took some up. Then her perceptions awoke, for she saw the glitter was of lead, not silver. Lead!—she remembered about the main vein, and Iveson's belief in its presence somewhere on the Beechwood farm—her brain reeled—a cry of joy escaped her, and then she remembered that

the farm no longer belonged to her father. Clutching the grains in her hand she hastened back to the spring, and met Iveson coming in search of her.

“Look here,” she exclaimed, “hold your hand and see what I have found.”

She poured the earth containing the shining grains into his outstretched palm. His cheek flushed, his eye sparkled, and he eagerly inquired where she had found the lead. She guided him to the place; he saw and rejoiced.

“What a pity that we could not take your advice and raise the money without selling the farm, but you see necessity has no law.”

“But we will buy it back again. We'll start working at once—before Martinmas we shall have ore enough to reclaim the whole.”

“But—is it quite honourable, Mr. Iveson?”

“Perfectly so, I assure you. Trust it all to me, and I promise you that if the present owner is not satisfied, I will, in your father’s name, yield the land to him. But we won’t make the new vein the dale’s gossip till we have time to test it, so I’ll just pick up these morsels of lead, and say nothing for to-day.”

“Mr. Iveson, I had planned to wander into the mine and see George; but I met a strange man who rather frightened me, so I gave up the idea. Do you think it involves any danger?”

Iveson looked troubled.

“Was the man rude to you?” he asked.

“No, indeed. Quite the contrary. He was very respectful, but he seemed to be looking through both papa and me at the same time.”

“There was a man here three weeks ago

questioning all the people as to a son of the colonel's. I encountered him, and hoped I had thrown him off the scent by telling him that I knew the colonel had a son, and that he had cut off all communication with him. I guessed he was an emissary from Lord Dungarret, and I fear this may have to do with the same affair. But don't alarm yourself; he may be what he professes to be—merely a strange servant. In any case it is better for you not to go near the mine to-day, there are so many people about on the moor."

They returned to where Colonel Hilary still slept, and were surprised to find the stranger in question standing by his side. He had in his hand a large jug, and as Iveson and Alice approached he touched his hat obsequiously, and asked—

"Please, Mr. Hilary, may I take water from your spring for the party over there?"

Richard noticed the strange capacity which his eyes possessed of transfixing two persons in one gaze, and he paid him back with a scrutiny as searching, while he said carelessly,

“Take water and welcome ; but you are mistaken in addressing me as Mr. Hilary. *Colonel* Hilary is there.”

“I beg pardon. I supposed you to be his son. The young gentleman is not ill, I hope?”

This last sentence was addressed to Alice.

“I hope not, but it is some time since I heard of him,” she said sadly, and with some confusion, which Iveson noticed and regretted. He frowned at the man, took the jug from him, and filled it at the spring, and then, Elsie having seated herself beside her father, he said in a low tone—

“From your manner I infer that you are an educated man. You should, therefore,

have the sense not to ask young ladies about scapegrace brothers, of whom they cannot fail to be ashamed."

Gray looked baffled, and, "hoping no offence," he proceeded to execute his errand. He was received by Smith in a manner that could not be accounted complimentary.

"You and me suldn't agree long as fellow-sarvents, cousin."

"Should we not? What for?"

"'Cause I suldn't fancy your sarving yer-self' when you were making believe to sarve me."

"Exactly so. But you see, Mr. Smith, I only do make believe to serve you. In reality I'm in pursuit of health. But here come our masters."

Smith did not relish the interruption. He felt more and more piqued by the man's persistent reserve, and more and more resolved

to overcome it, but like other people he had to wait his time.

Colonel Hilary and his daughter accompanied Richard Iveson for a short distance, just to see a shot or two ; but the shooter's arm was unnerved by the presence in which he stood, and he could not hit at all, though he had scarcely fired a shot in vain all the morning. He was really relieved when they left him, but he found the interest of the sport was gone, and he was half inclined to return to the Hall and work in the garden. But the advent of the stranger had filled him with a new anxiety, and, after brief reflection, he turned his steps toward the mine.

He reached the Smelt-mill, and entered the counting-house, put some candles in his pocket, and filled his empty flask with brandy. He was then on the point of going on to the mine, but remembered some papers that he

thought he might have need of. So he returned, unlocked the desk, and took out the documents. As he did so, a shadow fell across the window, and looking round suddenly he caught sight of the face of Edmund Gray, pressed close to the glass. He came forth at once, and finding both Gray and his host outside, he addressed the former with some displeasure.

“Your manners are offensive, sir. What motive can you assign for thus prying into another man’s office?”

“I meant no harm,” replied Gray, doggedly. “My cousin here wondered what you were about with your gun on his moors, and he reckoned it was his duty to come and see.”

“And did you come all this distance out of your way, after your hard day’s work, to warn me off, Mr. Smith? We’ve known one

another a great many years to little purpose, if our mutual trust is at so low an ebb."

"It's only your doings of late that has made me suspicious, Richard," Joseph replied, with a self-righteous air. "But when I find a man making secrets out of everything, buying property from reduced gentlefolks in times of distress at a low figure, and making believe he hasn't got it, then says I, 'That man's not above picking off a bird or two belonging to another, and it's time I defended my master's property.' Duty is duty, Richard Iveson, and with your leave I'll carry your gun for you till you are off my moor."

Iveson's blood was at boiling point; he knew that Smith was purposely insulting him, but he resolved to keep the peace if possible, because he suspected him of playing a far deeper game than met the eye. He stepped back to the counting-house door and locked

it, Smith held out his hand for the gun, but as he measured the stalwart proportions of the agent, he thought it better not to attempt force.

“When you hear me fire a shot on your moor, Mr. Smith, you may ask for my gun, and I will give it to you ; till then I carry it myself.”

And he strode away in the direction of Beechwood.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MINER LAYS THE TRAIN.

“Welcome, terrific glen !” he said,
 “Thy gloom, that Eblis’ self might dread,
 Is heav’n to him that flies from chains !”

MOORE’S *Fire-Worshippers*.

SMITH had attained his object, and wrung from his new cousin an explanation of his mission to the Yorkshire moors. He shook his head doubtfully. He didn’t think that a man could be concealed in the old Hall without Barbara’s knowledge, and Barbara gossiped so freely with his Hannah ; she would be sure to have let it out to her.

Iveson had taken a mysterious turn of late, but Smith had only supposed he was feathering his own nest at the expense of the fallen fortunes of the colonel, and that he did not wonder at; but it might be that he had another motive, only Richard had ever been reckoned too sensible a man to run risk for nothing. However that might be, he proposed to watch Iveson, as the best chance of getting a clue to the mystery.

In pursuance of this design, the two men separated for awhile, Smith accompanying his employers to their home, and then rejoining Gray at an appointed trysting-place. Gray had just watched Iveson proceeding towards the smelt-mill, so the friends followed him there, and would have remained hidden, but for the inopportune brilliancy of the sunset, which threw too clear a shadow into the room.

When Iveson had disappeared, the two sat down to consult; but Smith's practical mind soon hit on a wiser plan.

"We are hungry and dry, mate, let us go to the Raven's Nest and get our supper. The moor is quiet now, and we have it all to ourselves; we can lay plans as we go."

Gray rose with alacrity; the thought of supper was welcome in the extreme, and he hastened forward, Smith keeping close at his side. Gray was the first to speak.

"Whatever that fellow came to the mill for, he didn't do it," he said

"Just what I was thinking," replied Smith.

"He wouldn't come after a hard day's work just to take a few letters out o' his desk. No, no, he had some other business in hand. I wonder if it had anything to do with seeking lead; but he wouldn't be after that when he had clashed hissel' with shooting all day."

"I suppose he could get the lead any day."

"Nay, there you're out. T'veins thinned out, and t' mine's closed for want o' a few dead men. There's not been a bit o' lead got these six weeks, indeed the mine's been closed."

"Six weeks, that's just our date. What if our man be lurking in the mine?"

Smith stopped, took off his hat and scratched his head. He leaned against the wall under the beech trees and uttered a low whistle.

"It would be the best hiding-place in the country round," he said, "and Iveson knows every foot of it. I know it pretty well mysel', for the matter o' that. If he's there, Iveson will be doubly on the watch now that he has seen us prowling about, so we'd better have a look into t'mine to-night."

"I should say let us go at once, only we

should need lanterns, and maybe weapons.”

“No weapons. We couldn’t use ’em. We must take him by surprise, if we take him at all. Come on, mate, we’ll get ourselves filled first, then we’ll take some candles and have a look at t’mine. It’s a thing as a stranger seeking health should see.”

They went on their way, not with very elastic steps, for they were weary with long walking among the ling, especially Gray, who was little used to such exercise.

Hannah felt that full justice was done to her cooking powers, for the fried beef and onions vanished in quantities before the efforts of the two sportsmen ; but she was puzzled in the extreme by their announcement that they must go out again presently, and she was only half blinded by a hint of her husband’s regarding poachers.

“There’s nobody likely but Jif Coates, and

he's off Patterdale way ; he nobbut comed home a bit at Midsummer, for he'd addled brass toward t' prizes for t' fut and galloway races, and a fine time o' it he had, he wasn't to say sober all t' week. There's his brother Kit Coates, to be sure, but he's a decent sort o' body, and nobbut taks a reek o' baccy and a lile sup o' gin at home. All his bairns has got t' waterjags, such a sight they are to see."

"Never you mind who the poacher is, missis ; it's my duty as keeper to see to t' end o' any gun I hear cracking, and so I'm off now. Ye can put a peat or two on t'fire and leave t' kettle handy, for we are like enough to want a sup o' grog when we come back."

"Ye're leaving t' guns. Ye'd better tak 'em, it's safer."

"No, no, I don't want guns. They only make bloodshed, and we are for peace and

reason," and Joseph winked at his comrade.

They walked quickly across the moor, and Smith declared himself all the better for his supper; but Gray felt more thoroughly beaten than before, and heartily wished that he had postponed the excursion to another night.

All was still above and around them, and darkness held empire everywhere. A glimmer shone from a window at the Beechwood Farm as they passed by, and Joseph shook his fist at his undutiful son, supposed to be beside the light, and then they went on their way in silence. The falling of the water from the little aqueduct at the smelt-mill greeted their ear as they rounded the brow of the hill; but no other sound mingled with it, and when they spoke, their voices sounded so unnaturally loud that they instinctively subdued them to a whisper.

They reach the entrance to the mine just

as the moon rises, and proceed to strike a light, and provide themselves with a flaring dip candle each. Thus illuminated, they enter the level, and chat more easily because of the noisy accompaniment of their echoing footsteps.

“How chill it feels!” said Gray, shuddering. “I had no idea there was so much water in the road; my feet are wet.”

“Never heed that,” replied Smith, cheerily. “A man can live many a year after wetting his feet. It’s wetter than usual just now; see now, t’ watter from t’ roof has put out your candle. Light it again, and look sharp.”

Gray was shivering, and seemed not to hear him. Smith reiterated his command in a higher tone.

“Light your candle again, man, and look sharp.”

He had tramped on at a quicker rate than

his companion, and Gray was some yards in the rear, so he had also to raise his voice in replying.

“I have no matches, you must stop and light it for me.”

They had advanced about half a mile along the level, when this slight accident took place. There was a foot of water at that part, because the flooring was slightly lower than in the rest of the level, and the constant dripping from the roof kept up the supply. Smith turned sulkily, stuck his candle in a hole in the rock, and took out his matches to re-light that of his neighbour; at the same moment the light fell sputtering into the water, a heavy splash came over his lucifer-box, and a slight touch behind laid him sprawling amid the stones and water.

Smith uttered an oath, then, raising his voice as he gathered himself up, he cried aloud :

“Him as gave me that push shall repent it sorely afore long.”

The echoes died away, and the irate man listened in vain for any movement that might betray the whereabouts of his assailant; nothing was heard in the level but the dripping of the water.

“It ain’t o’ no use follering on him,” growled Smith, sulkily; “we’d better get out o’ this afore we lose knowledge o’ which way t’ mouth stands. Come away, cousin, we can call on t’ young squire another day, and bring plenty o’ folks with us; he’s showed us his whereabouts beautiful.”

Gray was thankful to beat a retreat, for he was utterly overfaced, and the keen suffering induced by physical fatigue quenched his ardour. The cousins groped their way out of the mine by slow degrees, often stumbling or striking against the wall, and shivering ter-

ribly with the chill and wetting. They were right thankful to emerge on to the open moor, and regarded the starlight as a dazzling illumination.

The kettle stood beside the fire in the warm kitchen at the Raven's Nest, and Smith plied his exhausted comrade with a glass of grog of extra strength. Both retired to rest just as the sun rose, and if they felt worn and crest-fallen then, their chagrin was still greater in the morning, when Gray showed symptoms of rheumatic fever, and Smith felt barely equal to attending upon the sportsmen for a short day's shooting.

Yet when night came again Smith's eagerness for adventure revived. He was impelled to a fresh attempt to hunt down poor George by the belief that it was he who had knocked him down on the preceding night, and he urged every argument upon Gray to persuade

him to join in the adventure. Gray was sulky and contradictory, he did not want any steps to be taken while he was disabled, and so he turned a deaf ear to all his representations, and Joseph was obliged to abandon his scheme for want of co-operation. But on the succeeding day matters took a different turn.

Smith lounged down to the village, and there encountered Barbara buying candles and soap at the one shop. Of course he entered into conversation with her, and inquired how Richard Iveson comported himself in his new apartments.

"Nay," replied Barbara, "I don't think he likes 'em at all; at any rate, he's gone away; he started as soon as t' twelfth was overed."

"Gone away! why, where has he gone to?"

"He didn't say. He tuk a portmantle, and had on his Sunday clothes, and he druv to Slateford."

“His Sunday clothes! What likes were they?”

“Oh! t’ waistcoat and trowsers were a kind o’ pepper and salt, and t’ coat was dark. He’s a fine man is Richard, and cuts a good figure in his Sunday clothes!”

“And you don’t know were he went to?”

“Nay, how suld I? Maybe to Glasgow; he’s most comrades there, and Nancy says near all his letters is fra’ Scotland. Jif Coates met him a-driving to t’ town, and he said he looked as if he’d got summut on his mind, for he didn’t neither speak nor nod to him; and you know Jif allays croaks grandly o’ t’ overlooker.”

“Jif Coates! Then is Jif back in these parts?”

“Ay, he’s back. He’s fair stalled o’ Patterdale. He’s keen after t’ old mine, and wanted young Iveson to put him on at dead

work, to be paid when t' vein was found. He's sore put about at him being out o' t' way."

Smith hastened in search of Jif, and found him in the public-house; he soon drew from him all that Barbara had already told, then he began to throw in insinuations.

"Ye've no great miss o' Iveson, Jif. He's waxed terrible proud of late, and holds hisself above us all. He's a changed man is Iveson."

Jif's brow clouded.

"He's been a good friend to me and mine," he growled; "my poor lad would ha' been in prison just now instead of a respected coachman if Richard Iveson had not set him up to make a new crakter. When I was hurted in t'mine he would come and tak' a reek o' baccy and a bit o' crack wi' me, and he oft brought me my dinner. Nay, Mr. Smith, I'll

hear nowt ill again Iveson. I'd never ha' left him, tho' I hadn't been able to make salt to my taties out o' t' mine, but for t' cornel's insulting me."

"You are a decent man, Jif, as I s' allays said, and you've not had justice done you. It's my belief as Iveson has brought strange folk here for the dead work; I've seen men mysel' about the mine mouth o' nights, but they kept it so terrible quiet. I'm fair minded to go away to t' mine this minute and see if its all ship-shape as when you left it. Scarce a hand turn was done after you went away, so you'd ken the look o' things, wouldn't you, Jif?"

"Ay, that I suld. And I do hold it unhandsome o' Iveson to bring strangers here. If I find that he's been up to that shamble, I s' believe all that you say about his pride."

Smith had got all that he desired—a com-

panion in the mine, and one who knew every turn of the passages, sumphs and all. In high spirits he started on his excursion, delighted to outwit Gray, and hoping to seize the fox before the huntsman knew that the hounds were out. Such a golden opportunity, while Iveson was out of the way !

This time Smith took care that each was provided with matches and candles, and he carried his gun, too, in case he wished either to use force or to give an alarm.

They enter the level, and it bears exactly the same aspect that it bore the night of the twelfth ; Smith, however, makes no allusion to that occasion, and he passes the submerged part and the drowned candle without hazarding any remark. Jif takes the first turn to the right, they pass the end of the tramway and the trapdoor, and then they find an accumulation of rubbish, the cleavage giving evidence of recent

and often of unskilled work ; and as Jif examines the unsymmetrical excavation with eager and angry eyes, he catches sight of a sparkle at the end of the opening ; and lo ! the much-desired main vein is exposed to view ! The miner sank gasping upon a stone, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and pointing to the minute opening, exclaimed :

“They’ve got it anyhow ! And if that fellow’s away hiring foreign miners, t’ Botcherdale lads’ll take his life.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ALARM IS GIVEN.

And next was painted Covetise,
That eggeth folke in many a gise,
To take and yeve right nought againe,
And great treasures up to laine.
And that is she that for usure
Leneth to many a creature,
The lasse for the more winning,
So covetous is her brenning,
And that is she for pennies fele,
That teacheth for to rob and stele.

CHAUCER.

THE emigrant ship sailed from Bristol on the day appointed, and Broad's two daughters, who had had a holiday to see their parents off, returned to their master's house, now their only home, with very different feelings.

Mercy had wept herself weary, and looked very pale and sad, so that Herbert felt it necessary to call her into the library and soothe and comfort her. But Mahala looked only more stolid than usual, and a fierce fire burned in her eyes.

Mr. Aylmer returned from a clerical meeting, and found Mahala waiting on her mistress.

“My dear,” he said, disregarding the girl’s presence, “what are we paying for meat per pound? Mr. Churchhill gets his at eightpence from Trowbury—fine pieces and coarse all at the same price.”

“I really cannot answer your question,” replied his wife. “Since this last attack of illness I have left everything in Mahala’s hands. She is so thoroughly efficient both in her management and her accounts, that I have felt no care.”

Mahala blushed her purplest blush, and her employers ascribed it to a sense of gratified worth.

“Show me the butcher’s book, Mahala. I have full confidence in you, but I want to see Crompton’s prices.”

Again Mahala blushed, and replied hurriedly that it had “gone to be made up;” then she hastened from the room.

Mr. Aylmer stayed chatting with his wife for some time. The sum of money required to clear off Herbert’s debts had taken all his father’s private fortune, and the income from his profession was now his sole dependence. This reduction of means necessitated many an anxious thought of care, and he now expressed a wish that his wife would resume the charge of the housekeeping.

“Not that I doubt Mahala’s prudence,” he said; “but it stands to reason that you must

have more experience than she can possibly have acquired."

Mrs. Aylmer readily promised to do as he wished, and the bells beginning to ring for evening service, he left her and repaired to the church.

Mercy had finished washing the tea-cups when the bells began to ring, and Mahala bid her put the china by quickly, for master and Mr. Herbert were off to church, and she had best follow.

"It be your turn, Mahla," she replied; "you do seem tired enough—leave me to clean the kitchen, and do you go to the church."

Mahala eyed her suspiciously.

"I be going to do my own work and to bide at home. Do as I bid you, and get your bonnet on."

Mercy obeyed very willingly. She had

always loved to go to church, and now it was pleasanter than ever, for she could hear Mr. Herbert's beautiful voice through all the singing.

When she was gone Mahala walked up to the drawing-room. She was dirty and untidy ; of late she had become increasingly so, and her mistress had forbore to expostulate, because she believed the time spent in waiting upon her caused the irregularity. Her stockings were in holes, her feet thrust into old goloshes instead of shoes, her cotton gown soiled and torn, and no white collar or kerchief relieved the dulness of the dusky colouring of dress and person. She entered softly, closing the door behind her ; then she stood at the foot of Mrs. Aylmer's couch, and with clasped hands and pallid lips she exclaimed—

“ Oh, missis, lend me thirty pounds, for the love of God ! ”

Mrs. Aylmer gasped for breath.

“Impossible, Mahala,” she said, “I have not thirty shillings of my own, and even your master will not have thirty pounds till January. What can you want with such an enormous sum!”

Mahala sank on her knees, her dirty cap fell off as she rocked herself to and fro, her unkempt hair fell around her pallid face; she continued her entreaty.

“Oh, get it for me! Mr. Robson will lend it if you ask him. It will save me. I have served you faithfully for ten years, day and night, night and day. I will serve you three years without wages for the thirty pounds. I shall be lost without it. Oh, help me, help me!”

“Mahala, do be calm. Sit down beside me, and tell me what is wrong. For what purpose do you want thirty pounds?”

"I have lost the money. It was not my own; I have none, not a penny. It was given me to keep, and if I can't show it in a few days, I must go to prison. Oh, for the love of pity, lend it to me."

"Who gave it you to keep? Was it young Crompton?"

"Crompton! No. I have nothing to do with he. I haven't seen he since him did leave this village. No, it was aunt gived it to me to keep."

"And when did you lose it?"

"This morning or yesterday, I don't know which."

"Why did you carry it in your pocket?"

"I didn't carry it in my pocket. I kept it in my work-box, and somebody has taken it out."

"Where was your box?"

"In the kitchen."

“Then you must consider who has been in the kitchen; the mason who is building the new wood-house will know if any tramps passed him. You know I have repeatedly desired you to keep the door locked.”

“And the door was locked.”

“Nonsense, Mahla; how then could any one get in to take the money?”

“I didn’t say as any one got in. I said I lost it, and so I did. It was in my pocket when I went to the shop this morning.”

“You contradict yourself, Mahala. One moment you say it was not in your pocket, and the next you say it was; you declare that it was in the box, and that it was not, in the same breath. I must consult your master before lending you anything.”

Mahala started to her feet like one possessed; she flung her arms into the air, stamping with her feet.

“Here’s gratitude!” she shrieked; “I have nursed you, put up with your tiresome ways, made a slave of myself to you, and now you will not stir a hand to save my character. Take my curse for your pride and cruelty. Cursed be your eyes and your tongue! Cursed be your limbs and your body! Let the light curse you by day, and the darkness by night, and let your children be lost for want of friends!”

She rushed out of the room, shutting the door with a tremendous sound, and treating the kitchen door in the same manner.

Mrs. Aylmer lay trembling on her couch. Alone in the house, and unable even to move across the floor, what might not that desperate woman attempt against her in her fury? She listened intently, but no sound indicative of Mahala’s return reached her ear; she could hear the soughing of the evening breeze, the

tinkle of sheep-bells on the downs, and the song of praise in the church, but no less harmonious sound broke the silence. How often she glanced at her watch, how slowly the minutes passed by! How terribly long Mr. Aylmer's sermon must be! how inconsiderate he was in staying to speak to the clerk! But at last—at last—oh, the blessed sound!—there were footsteps along the garden walk, and the husband and son entered the room together.

Herbert started at the sight of his mother's countenance.

"I fear you are ill again, my sweet mother!" he exclaimed.

She called them both to her and detailed the scene she had gone through, mingling her story with such sobs and starts as proved her nerves to have sustained a severe shock.

Mr. Aylmer wanted to call Mahala to his presence, but his wife so entreated to be

spared the sight of her that he changed his plan and proceeded to the kitchen to speak to her.

Mercy had returned from church at the same time that her master had done, and, on entering the kitchen, she found her sister sitting on a chair, her arms and chest leaning on the table, and wrapped in a profound sleep ; she was still attempting to rouse her when Mr. Aylmer came in.

He shook the girl roughly, and she grunted and changed her position, dropping her head heavily on the table again. A bottle stood beside her, empty now, but the smell left no doubt as to what its contents had been ; and the dirty slovenly woman sitting there, with her pans and pots left where they had last been used, the ashes not removed from the fire, nor the grease and footmarks from the floor, looked the very picture of the gin-drinker.

But the outward signs were not as patent

to Mercy as to her master, and she asked, with pallid cheek and trembling voice, if "Mahala was very ill."

"No, my child. Help her to bed and leave her, but don't give her either medicine or stimulant—beer or wine, I mean—without asking me first. When Mahala is settled, come and wait on your mistress."

The master did not go to bed that night. Pitying Mercy's youth and innocence, he abstained from telling her any evil of her sister, for that night at any rate; and he kept watch by his poor terrified wife, occasionally paying a visit to the kitchen to see that Mahala was still quiet, and neither doing damage to herself nor to the house.

In the morning he went himself to Crompton to ask for the butcher's book. To his horror he found that nothing had been paid since the beginning of his wife's illness, and

that thirty pounds were owing. In dismay and dread he directed his steps to the general shop, and there found an account against him of above twenty pounds. The milk was all owing for, and when he questioned the poor laundress, she burst into tears, and owned that she had done very wrong, for Mahla had bid her put "paid" to the book for several weeks without receiving the money, promising it in a lump when her master should give her a fresh supply. She dared not "go against" Mahla, so she supposed she must now lose her money. The flour bill was also unpaid, and the beer; everything, in short, which had been used in the house since the 1st of June was now owing for, and the butcher's book and shop account had stood for a longer period, these being bills which Mahala had been sent to pay. Mr. Aylmer hastened to examine his cheque-book, and found that

he had given Mahala seventy pounds from first to last, not a shilling of which had been applied to the purpose for which it was designed.

It was a terrible blow to him, for he was already sorely pressed for money, and he could see no reasonable hope of being able to clear these debts for years. He would question the wretched girl, and see what light she could throw on the matter.

He found her scrubbing out a pan with a bedroom towel, which she thrust into her pocket on his approach. She was neither cleaner nor tidier than she had been on the preceding day, and as she stood before her injured master no penitence appeared on her stolid bloated face; she fixed her eyes on the opposite wall, and stood in stupid silence.

“Mahala, how have you made away with all this money?”

“I don't know. I am a poor girl and can't reckon up like a scholar, but I do know that I have spent all you did give me for the house, and a deal of my own too.”

“That is impossible,” said Mr. Aylmer, sternly; “the sums you have had from me week by week this summer, rise considerably above the average of our family expenditure, even when the young ladies are at home. You have been very extravagant in the use of material, as well as dishonest in appropriating the money given to pay for it. You, perhaps, do not know that I could have you sent to prison for this.”

Her countenance changed. She fell on her knees.

“Oh! sir, have pity on me!” she cried; “I am a wretched ruined girl. I am far poorer than I was when I came into the house, for then I had decent plain clothes, now I

have only the clothes that are upon me, and all my wages is gone and my character too. I can't tell," she continued, her tone becoming fierce, "and I won't tell; and if you do send for the policeman, I'll do that against you that'll make you repent driving me desperate. Search my box if you like; and let me go poor and half naked, and with no home to shelter me—only let me go free."

Mr. Aylmer reasoned and entreated; if she would confess and repent, he would forgive; but all his arguments were in vain, she denied everything, and entrenched herself behind mysterious threats which, in his wife's delicate state of health, he dared not disregard. He bade her fetch her box down, and pack it in his presence—and truly she had scarcely anything to pack in it. He exacted a solemn promise that she would go to her aunt at Weston, made her wash herself and put on

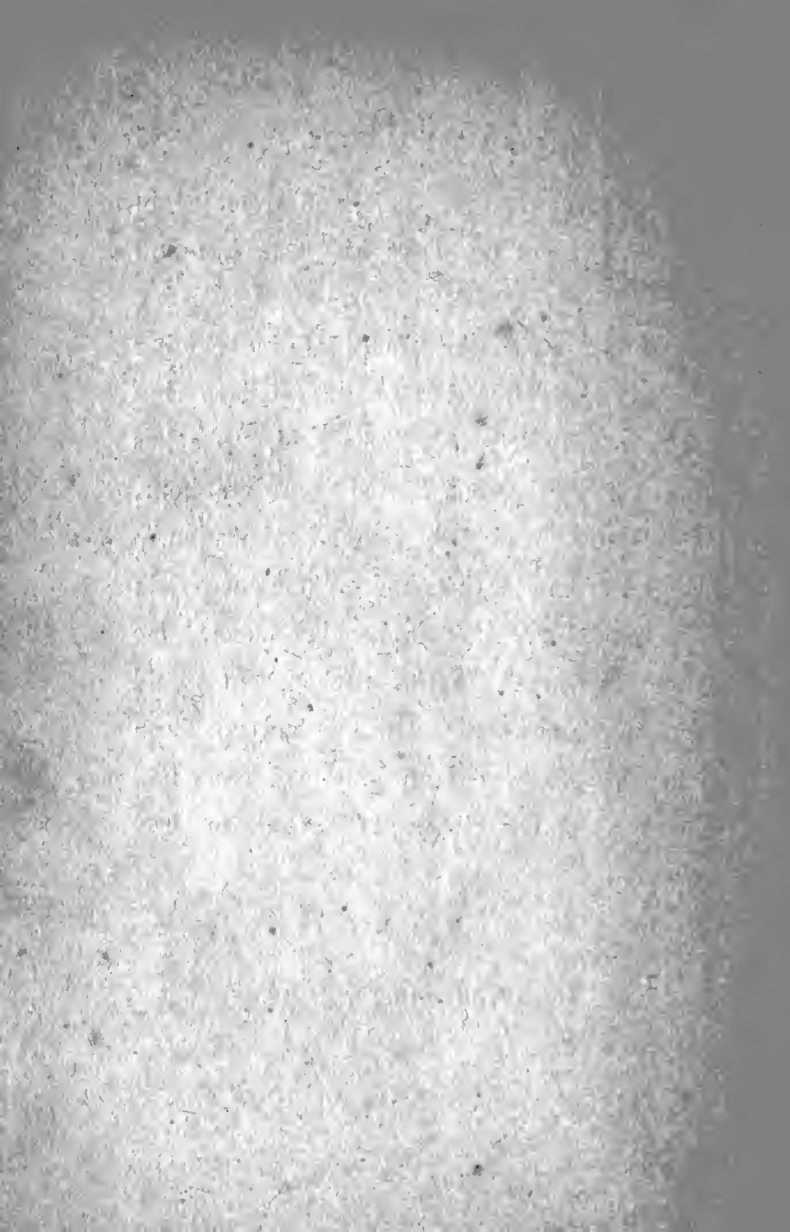
her bonnet and shawl; and then he drove her to Trowbury, took out a ticket for her to Weston, and started her in the train, returning to write to the said aunt a faithful statement of all that had taken place.

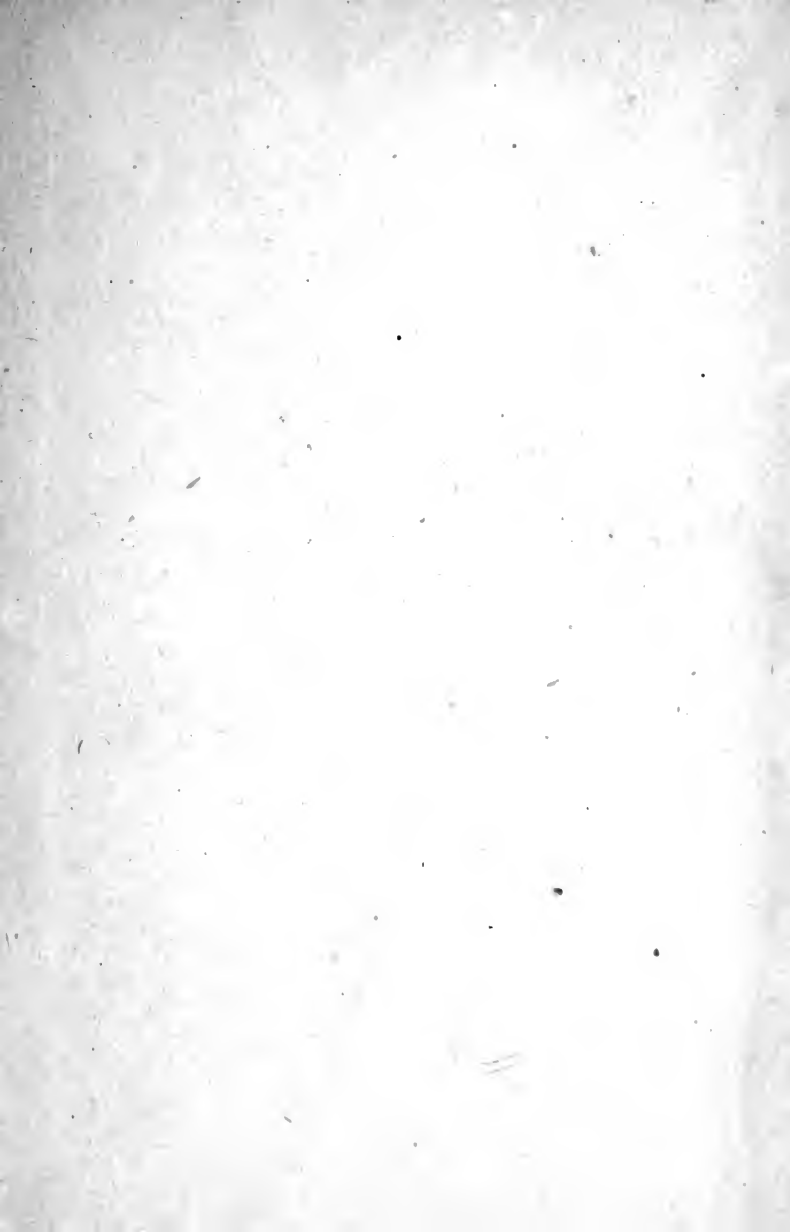
Herbert was leaving the next day, for Lord Dungarret had got him a situation in London. So his father deferred all further examination into the peculations of Mahala till after his departure; then he went through the cook's department, to see what would be needed for a new cook. To his dismay he found the presses stripped, the jams and pickles were gone from the store-room, the crockery from the kitchen, the very pans were fewer by two-thirds, and the cellar only contained a small quantity of British wine and piles of empty bottles. Scarcely any jewels remained in Mrs. Aylmer's trinket-box. Mercy heard his exclamations of anger and grief with

dismay ; she was very pale, and trembled in every limb, but he spoke kindly to her, and bade her not to grieve. The next morning he wondered that she was so late in bringing his shaving water, but he hesitated to ring and arouse her, “for,” he said, “she has very likely cried and fretted to a late hour, and is now sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.”

At last he did ring, and no one answered ; he rang again, and it produced no effect. He then descended to the kitchen, but could find Mercy nowhere. Her bed had not been slept in ; she was gone, and no traces could be found of her, either at Trowbury or elsewhere.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









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